NATION

35 captured Somali pirates arrive in India

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BUSINESS

Invest in India's chip sector, says EAM

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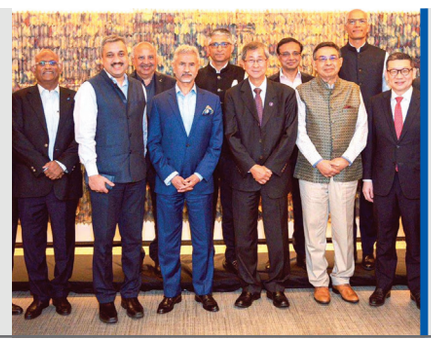

SPORTS

Harshit, Russell guide KKR to nervy four-run win over SRH

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Drought aid: K'taka drags Centre to SC

Centre has not released Rs 18K drought funds

BENGALURU, 23 MARCH

Karnataka government has filed a petition in Supreme Court demanding a direction to Centre to immediately release grants under National Disaster Response Fund (NDRF) to State, which is reeling under acute drought, Chief Minister Siddaramaiah on Saturday.

The State government requested Rs 18,171 crore as drought relief, but the Central government has not yet released any funds, Siddaramaiah said. "Because of circumstances like these, disaster management law has been made. We did not want to get to Supreme Court as we believed the Central government would pay us the compensation. Though it has been more than five months since we met them personally, nothing has happened so far," the Chief Minister said.

Siddaramaiah said he has filed a writ petition against the Central government under Article 32 of Constitution to give directions to Government of India to release NDR Funds immediately, which was supposed to be released by the Centre according to law. Supreme Court will hear the petition after its weekly vacation, he said.

The drought relief study team from the Centre came to the State in October. After the team submitted its report, it has to be studied and the compensation should be paid within a month, Siddaramaiah said. "Even after this, we met Prime Minister Modi on 20 December and explained about the drought in the State and requested him to release the money. We met Union Home Minister Amit Shah and explained the situation in the State. Shah said they have called a meeting on 23 December and will decide later. When Modi when came to Bengaluru, we appealed to him then as well. Then he said he will release the money. But no money has been given," Siddaramaiah said.

—Salar News

Siddaramaiah claimed that the Central government had violated the drought relief act **PHOTO: PTI**

Kerala takes Prez to SC over pending bills

Kerala also appealed against Gov Arif in SC

NEW DELHI, 23 MARCH

Kerala government has petitioned Supreme Court against President Droupadi Murmu withholding assent to four bills passed by state Assembly.

The plea, filed through advocate CK Sasi, said the matter relates to the acts of the Kerala Governor in reserving seven bills, which he was required to deal with himself, to the President. Not one of the seven bills had anything to do with Centre-state relations.

The state government said these bills had been pending with the Governor for about two years and his action "subverted" the functioning of the state legislature, rendering its very existence "ineffective and otiose". "The bills include public interest bills which are for the public good, and even these have been rendered ineffective by the Governor not dealing with each one of them 'as soon as possible' as required by the proviso to Article 200," the plea said.

The state government said on 23 and 29 February, Ministry of Home Affairs informed it that the President has withheld assent to four of the seven bills: University Laws (Amendment) Bill, 2021; Kerala Co-operative Societies (Amendment) Bill, 2022; University Laws (Amendment) Bill, 2022; and University Laws (Amendment) Bill, 2022.

The petition urged the court to declare as unconstitutional the President not granting assent to these bills without assigning a reason. The Constitution is silent on how much time the President can take in granting assent to a bill passed by a state legislature and referred to Rashtrapati Bhavan for presidential consideration or for denying consent.

CPI(M)-led Left Democratic Front (LDF) government has made Union government, the Secretary to the President of India, Kerala Governor Arif Mohammad Khan and his additional secretary the parties to the case. *—PTI*

LDF has made Union government, the Secretary to the President of India, Kerala Governor the parties to the case **PHOTO: PTI**

BJP ends alliance for LS, Assembly polls with Sikkim's SKM

GANGTOK, 23 MARCH

BJP on Saturday called off its alliance with the ruling Sikkim Krantikari Morcha (SKM) and announced that the party would go alone in the simultaneous Lok Sabha and assembly elections. The SKM, on the other hand, did not rule out the possibility of a post-poll alliance with the BJP on the lines of a similar arrangement made after the 2019 polls. Thve announcement to fight the upcoming polls alone was made by state BJP President DR Thapa, who returned to Sikkim after attending a meeting with the party's central leadership in Delhi on seat-sharing with SKM. ***—PTI***

EAM dismisses China's claims on AP as 'ludicrous'

SINGAPORE, 23 MARCH

External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar on Saturday dismissed China's repeated claims on Arunachal Pradesh as "ludicrous" and asserted that the frontier state was a "natural part of India". "This is not a new issue. I mean China has laid claim, it has expanded its claim. The claims are ludicrous to begin with and remain ludicrous today," he said in response to a question on the Arunachal issue after delivering a lecture at the prestigious NUS Institute of South Asian Studies here. He emphasised that Arunachal Pradesh was a "natural part of India." ***—PTI***

>>>More on Page 4&7

Govt extends ban on onion exports till further orders

NEW DELHI, 23 MARCH

The government has extended the export ban on onion till further orders to increase domestic availability and keep its prices under check. Earlier, it was prohibited till 31 March this year. "Export prohibition on export of onions valid till 31st March 2024, is extended until further orders," the Directorate General of Foreign Trade (DGFT) has said in a notification dated 22 March. ***—PTI***

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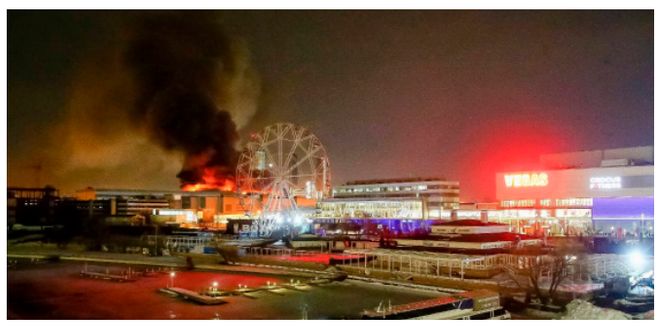
'TERROR ACT'

11 detained after 133 killed in Moscow concert attack



A massive blaze is seen over the Crocus City Hall on the western edge of Moscow, Russia **PHOTO: PTI**

MOSCOW, 23 MARCH

At least 11 people have been detained after gunmen stormed a concert hall in Moscow and opened fire on the crowd, the head of Russia's Federal Security Service told President Vladimir Putin on Saturday, according to Russian state news agency Tass. Four people directly involved in the attack are among 11 arrested.

At least 133 people were killed in the attack, including three children, Russian authorities said on Saturday. Images showed a fleet of emergency vehicles still gathered outside the ruins of Crocus City Hall, a shopping mall and music venue with a capacity of more than 6,000 people in Krasnogorsk, on Moscow's western edge. At least 140 people injured so far.

Friday's attack came just days after President Vladimir Putin cemented his grip on power in a highly orchestrated electoral landslide. The attack was the deadliest in Russia in years. Videos posted online showed gunmen in the venue shooting civilians at point-blank range. The roof of the theatre, where crowds had gathered Friday for a performance by the Russian rock band Picnic, collapsed as firefighters spent hours fighting a fire . *—AP*

Attackers had contacts with Ukraine: Russia

The attackers who were detained in the Bryansk region earlier this morning were "intending to cross over to Ukraine" and had "contacts on the Ukrainian side", Russia's security agency has said, according to Russian state-owned news agency Ria Novosti.

The criminals were cold-blooded and purposefully killed, shoot our citizens and kids at point-blank range. Whoever they are, whoever is guiding them. I repeat: we will identify and punish everyone who stands behind the terrorists.

—Vladimir Putin, Russia President

NO RELIEF FOR KEJRI AS HC DENIES URGENT HEARING

NEW DELHI, 23 MARCH

Delhi High Court on Saturday denied an urgent listing of the plea by Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal challenging his arrest and custody in Delhi Excise policy case.

Arvind Kejriwal, on Saturday moved the Delhi High Court, challenging his arrest and the order of remand granted by the trial court on 22 March.

However, Delhi High Court denied the same. The matter will be listed on the court's reopening on Wednesday, the Registrar General of the Delhi High Court confirmed.

Aam Aadmi Party leader and Punjab Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann on Saturday said that if his Delhi counterpart Kejriwal is sent to jail, they will approach the court for permission to set up his office in prison so that he can run his government from there. BJP has demanded the resignation of Kejriwal after he was sent to ED custody till 28 March. A delegation of Punjab BJP on Saturday met the state Chief Electoral Officer and pressed for an ED probe into the state excise policy, alleging "black money received by AAP through kickbacks" could be used during the Lok Sabha elections. —PTI/ANI

>>>More on Page 3

India protests Germany's remarks on Kejri's arrest

NEW DELHI, 23 MARCH

India on Saturday summoned the German Deputy Chief of Mission in New Delhi to lodge a strong protest on their foreign office spokesperson's remarks on the arrest of Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal.

Making a strong statement against the German Foreign Office spokesperson's remarks, India said that it sees these remarks as interference in India's 'judicial process' and 'undermining the independence' of the Indian judiciary', the Ministry of External Affairs said in a statement on Saturday.

On Friday, a spokesperson of the German Foreign Ministry when questioned on the arrest of Kejriwal said that he was entitled to a fair trial.

"We have taken note, India is a democratic country. We assume and expect that the standards relating to independence of Judiciary and basic democratic principles will also be applied in this case. Like anyone facing accusations, Kejriwal is entitled to a fair and impartial trial, this includes he can make use of all available legal avenues without restrictions. The presumption of innocence is a central element of the rule of law and must apply to him," the spokesperson of the German Foreign Ministry had said.

Kejriwal was on Friday, remanded to ED custody till 28 March, a day after he was arrested by the probe agency for alleged money laundering in connection with the Delhi excise policy case.

Special CBI judge Kaveri Baweja of the Rouse Avenue Court passed the order after Kejriwal was produced on Friday following his arrest on Thursday night by the central agency.

Two senior AAP leaders, Manish Sisodia and Sanjay Singh, are in judicial custody in the excise policy case. Sisodia, who was the then Delhi Deputy Chief Minister, was arrested by the CBI on 26 February following several rounds of questioning. On 5 October, ED arrested Sanjay Singh, who is a Rajya Sabha member. *—ANI*

Arvind Kejriwal **PHOTO: PTI**

Modi's 2-day visit to Bhutan cements ties

THIMPHU, 23 MARCH

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Saturday concluded a fruitful two-day state visit to Bhutan during which he assured Thimphu of New Delhi's firm support in its quest for development and agreed to provide Rs 10,000 crore to the Himalayan nation over the next five years.

On Saturday morning, Modi along with his Bhutanese counterpart Tshering Tobgay inaugurated a modern hospital for women and children built with Indian assistance in Thimphu.

In a special gesture, the King of Bhutan, Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck as well as Prime Minister Tobgay were present at the Paro International Airport to see off Prime Minister Modi.

"This has been a very special Bhutan visit. I had the opportunity to meet His Majesty the King, Prime Minister @tsheringtobgay and other distinguished people of Bhutan. Our talks will add even more vigour to the India-Bhutan friendship.

Modi also spoke of the Bhutanese government's 13th Five-Year Plan (FYP) and said, "Our full support and cooperation will be there".

The two Prime Ministers acknowledged that the exemplary ties of friendship between India and Bhutan are a source of strength for both partners and the region. PTI

World TB Day: Tobacco smokers at higher risk of developing tuberculosis, say experts. *—PTI*

Narendra Modi **PHOTO: PTI**

IN INDIAN WOMAN

Extreme heat at work doubles stillbirth risk

CHENNAI, 23 MARCH

Working in extreme heat can double the risk of stillbirth and miscarriage for pregnant women, according to new research from India.

The study found that the risks to mothers-to-be are significantly higher than previously thought.

Eight hundred pregnant women in the southern Indian state of Tamil Nadu took part in the study, which was started in 2017 by the Faculty of Public Health at the Sri Ramachandra Institute of Higher Education and Research (SRIHER) in Chennai.

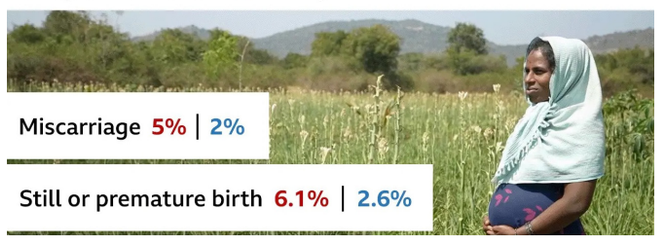
About half of those who took part worked in jobs where they were exposed to high levels of heat, such as agriculture, brick kilns and salt flats. The others worked in cooler environments, such as schools and hospitals, although some workers were also exposed to very high levels of heat in those jobs too. The pregnant women in the study in India are "at the forefront of experiencing climate change," says Prof Hirst, who is a UK-based consultant obstetrician, and Professor of Global Women's Health at medical research organisation The George Institute. For this study - funded by the Indian government - researchers used what is called the wet-bulb-globe-temperature (WBGT), which measures the effects of temperature, humidity, wind speed and radiant heat on human bodies. WBGT readings are often lower than the temperatures you might see forecast on the TV or a weather app.

The safe heat threshold for people doing heavy work is 27.5C WBGT. India is predicted to become one of the first countries in the world where temperatures will top the safe limit for healthy people who are simply resting in the shade.

The mechanisms around how and why heat impacts pregnant women and their growing babies in this troubling way are not well understood. A previous study in The Gambia found high temperatures could raise foetal heart rate and slow blood flow through the umbilical cord.

One theory is that when the mother gets too hot, blood could be diverted away from the foetus, to help cool the mother down. There is currently no official international advice for pregnant working women in the heat.

The main guidance that does exist for hot-weather working, is based on studies involving a man in the US military in the 1960s and 70s, weighing 70-75kg and with 20 per cent body fat. *—BBC News*



The safe heat threshold for people doing heavy work is 27.5C **PHOTO: BBC**

Free Sehri food for Ramadan in Bengaluru

MEGHANA PRASAD
BENGALURU, 23 MARCH

For the past 15 years, a group of friends in Bengaluru have been quietly offering a lifeline to students observing Ramadan away from home. Their initiative, Anjuman E Islamia, which translates to "The Companionship of Islam," provides free pre-dawn meals, or Sehri, to residents of paying guest (PG) accommodations and hostels across the City. This act ensures that students facing unfamiliar surroundings, limited access to kitchen facilities, and early morning commutes can still observe the pre-dawn meal, a crucial aspect of Ramadan.

Talking to **Salar News** General Secretary of Eidgah Masjid and Anjuman e Islamia, Abdul Razack Khan said ,"Many people struggle to find the right meals during Ramadan. We start early in the morning around 3 am and start sending out the meals to all the hostels and PGs across the City."

Consumed before the day's fast begins, it provides the energy to sustain one throughout the long day without food or water. The programme's focus on Sehri meals is deliberate. Iftar, the evening meal to break the fast, is often with the community, friends and family gathering to eat together. Sehri, on the other hand, falls before dawn, making it a solitary experience for many.

"The Iftar meal is available to everyone after the fasting," said Syed Feroz, one of the volunteersThe group operates entirely on a voluntary basis.

It ensures that students can still observe the pre-dawn meal **PHOTO: X**

Members not only contribute financially but also dedicate their pre-dawn hours to preparing hearty meals. A typical Sehri spread includes staples like dates, fruits, porridge, and sometimes even a savoury dish. Ayesha Kanum, an MBA student from Jayanagar, says, "These Sehri meals have been a game-changer for me. I can wake up for Sehri, have a proper meal, and head straight to my classes without having to worry about cooking."

Hajira Uzma, another PG resident near Whitefield, who works in an IT company, adds, "The fact that the food is healthy and fresh makes a huge difference. It helps me stay focused and energetic throughout the day at work. The food tastes amazing just like how we used to have back in my home-town in Hyderabad." *—Salar News*

BJP, JD(S) ticket aspirants starts campaign in Hassan

HASSAN, 23 MARCH

The dissent between BJP and JD(S) over Hassan Lok Sabha seat has intensified with ticket aspirant from both the parties started campaigning even before the announcement of the official candidate. JD(S)' sitting MP Prajwal Revanna has started campaigning as an alliance candidate without consulting BJP leaders. On the other side, BJP State General Secretary Pritam Gowda's associate HP Kiran Kumar too started politicking on Saturday by praying at Shree Siddeshwara Swamy Temple in Hassan. Meanwhile, JD(S) Chief HD Kumaraswamy, who is recuperating from a heart surgery in Chennai hospital, is expected to return soon. BJP high command is planning to organise a joint convention in Mysuru and Hassan upon his return, aiming to assuage concerns among local party leaders. *—Salar News*

Vijayendra inaugurates BJP's media centre

BENGALURU, 23 MARCH

Karnataka BJP Chief BY Vijayendra on Saturday inaugurated and opened a dedicated media centre of the party as a part of the Lok Sabha election preparation. "'Once again Modi' are not only the words of BJP workers. People of India want Modi as Prime Minister. His popularity is rising day by day. People of India believe in Modi. His vision is the development of India. Karnataka is South India's gateway to BJP...," said Vijayendra. The BJP chief said that Congress does not have candidates in Karnataka for the Lok Sabha election and the JD (S) is also with them.*—ANI*

Police busts adulteration racket in City

BENGALURU, 23 MARCH

City police busted a racket forging branded products with cheap fake chemicals at Mallarbanwadi village in Nelamangala taluk of Bengaluru Rural district on Saturday. The racket was busted by the joint efforts of the police and the IP Investigation Detective Service.

Mahesh Gandhi, Ashwin and Nirmal were arrested by the police during the raid in a godown where branded detergents were being copied. They used to buy a load of fake detergent chemicals from a manufacturing unit at Avalahalli near Hoskote and pack them in branded boxes.

Further, the police have gathered information about the fake brands being sold in several parts of the State, including Bengaluru, by filling detergent pouches with fake printed branded labels and converting them into real brands.

During the raid, hundreds of boxes of detergents, labels, and empty bottles worth Rs 15 to 20 lakh were seized. The mixing machines have been sealed in the godown. A case has been registered at Nelamangala Rural Police Station and an investigation is on.*—Salar News*

₹ 15.78cr cash and alcohol worth ₹23.37cr seized

BENGALURU, 23 MARCH

The Election Commission (EC) on Saturday said Rs 6.13 crore cash was seized in the last 24 hours in the run-up to Lok Sabha elections taking the total amount of cash seized in the State to Rs 15.78 crore since the Model Code of Conduct came into force. According to EC officials, since the MCC came into force, the flying squads, static surveillance teams and police authorities have seized Rs 15.78 crore cash, Rs 17.3 lakh worth of freebies, 7.41 lakh litres of liquor worth over Rs 23.37 crore, 66.34 kg narcotic substances worth over Rs 65 lakh and precious metals valued at over Rs 43 crore.

496 FIRs are registered with regard to seizure of cash, liquor, drugs and freebies, while 72,627 arms have been deposited, 836 arms were impounded, eight arms licences have been cancelled, 4,175 cases were booked under preventive sections of CrPC, out of which 4,826 persons were bounded over. *—PTI*

Where is Acche Din?, CM asks Modi

CM says BJP provokes people emotionally and abandons them

BENGALURU, 23 MARCH

Chief Minister Siddaramaiah on Saturday questioned Prime Minister Narendra Modi over the promises made during the previous General Elections. "Where is Acche Din? (Good Days). Did the price of diesel, petrol and gas go down? Did they succeed in creating two crore jobs a year? All they do is blatant lying," Siddaramaiah said.

BJP provokes people emotionally and abandons them. "We are not like the BJP, we will respond to the needs of the lives around us," Siddaramaiah said while speaking at a conference held for guarantee schemes' officers at KPCC office here.

Modi is the most lying Prime Minister among the Prime Ministers of India, he said. "They have now stolen our guarantees and named it as the Modi guarantee. Our guarantee schemes are for all religions, castes and classes. Our Congress government is making programmes that treat everyone equally," Siddaramaiah said.

Siddaramaiah **PHOTO: PTI**

Siddaramaiah said the Congress government is empowering the people, women and youth of the country economically and socially. "The only danger for Congress right now is BJP claiming all our programmes as theirs. We have told the chairpersons and members of the guarantee scheme committee to tell the truth to people," the Chief Minister said. *—Salar News*

- BJP provokes people emotionally and abandons them. "We are not like the BJP, we will respond to the needs of the lives around us," Siddaramaiah said while speaking at a conference held for guarantee schemes' officers at KPCC office here.Modi is the most lying Prime Minister among the Prime Ministers of India, he said

BJP HITS BACK

R Ashoka **PHOTO: PTI**

Ashoka dismisses CM's 'Operation Kamala' claim

BENGALURU, 23 MARCH

Dismissing Chief Minister Siddaramaiah's claim that the BJP was offering Rs 50 crore each to ruling Congress MLAs to switch sides ahead of Lok Sabha elections, Leader of Opposition R Ashoka on Saturday said his party has made no such approaches to the rival camp.

"Congress is staring at defeat in Lok Sabha elections, which is why he (Siddaramaiah) is trying to deflect public attention by making such unfounded claims. He has dreamed up this 'Operation Kamala' to hoodwink the people. We don't have any intention to destabilise this government. In fact, they are driving their own government to the point of ruin," Ashoka said.

Meanwhile, the BJP's State Chief BY Vijayendra on Saturday inaugurated a media centre of the party as a part of the Lok Sabha election preparation.

The BJP Chief said Congress does not have candidates in the State for the Lok Sabha election, as JD(S) is also with his party.

In the 2019 Lok Sabha elections, BJP decimated the Congress and JDS even though they fought together. BJP had won a record 25 seats while the Congress and JD-S had won just one seat each.

On Friday, BJP leader and former chief minister Basavaraj Bommai said the party aims to make Narendra Modi the Prime Minister again. Addressing party members in Hubballi on Friday, Bommai said, "We are on the battlefield and we must see only the target and not who is on the left or right side. We aim to make Modi PM again and to achieve that, we must vote for Pralhad Joshi, who is the BJP candidate from Dharwad constituency."

Bommai was campaigning for Joshi, who is contesting from the Dharwad constituency for BJP in Hubballi. *—ANI*

- In 2019 BJP decimated the Congress and JDS even though they fought together. BJP had won a record 25 seats while the Congress and JD-S had won just one seat each

AHEAD OF LS POLLS

Vijayendra urges Congress to take firm stand on Mekedatu

BENGALURU, 23 MARCH

BJP State President BY Vijayendra urged the ruling Congress government to take a firm stand on the Mekedatu project.

"It is high time Congress took a stand on the Mekedatu project. BJP anyway is not going to let the welfare of the people be compromised," said Vijayendra at a press conference after inaugurating the BJP media centre for the 2024 elections at GM Rejoice Hotel.

Regarding the upcoming Lok Sabha elections, Vijayendra ridiculed Congress for its decision to field ministers in Bengaluru which was eventually quashed. "They dreamt of winning more seats by fielding ministers in the City but they soon realized the wave of BJP and understood that they would lose. BJP-JD(S) workers will work together to win 28 seats in the State," he said.

BY Vijayendra **PHOTO: PTI**

Though BJP has been in power at the Centre for 10 years, the popularity of Prime Minister Narendra Modi has only increased, said Vijayendra while speaking about Modi's popularity.

"'Once Again Modi' are not just the words of BJP party workers only but of the people across the country. People of the country want him as Prime Minister. His only vision is to develop India. Karnataka is South India's getaway to BJP," he said. *—Salar News*

'TREASURE HUNT' LED TO MURDER, SAY POLICE

TUMAKURU, 23 MARCH

Three people who were found burnt in a car in Tumakuru district hailed from Belthangadi Taluk of Mangaluru and they might have been duped on the pretext of 'treasure', police said on Saturday.

The bodies were found in a burnt car on a lake bed in Kuchangi village on the outskirts of the district headquarters town of Tumakuru on Friday.The culprits seem to have duped the trio on the pretext of selling 'treasure', police said.Forensic report suggests that they might have been killed elsewhere and their bodies were brought to Tumakuru and burnt. *—PTI*

Water scarcity hits City public washrooms

BENGALURU, 23 MARCH

The bustling IT hub of India, Bengaluru, is facing the challenge of a persistent water shortage. This scarcity is hitting a crucial aspect of urban life that is sanitation. Public toilets, essential for maintaining hygiene, are struggling to keep up as the city grapples with limited water supply.

The lack of water poses significant challenges. Public toilets require a regular flow for flushing and maintaining hygiene. This scarcity not only impacts cleanliness but also discourages usage, potentially leading to public health concerns.

Dr Harish Kumar K **PHOTO: PTI**

- This scarcity not only impacts cleanliness but also discourages usage, potentially leading to public health concerns

Dr. Harish Kumar K, Special Commissioner of Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike (BBMP) highlighting the impact said, "There are around 478 public toilets in this City. The water crisis has hampered the functioning of as many as 30-40 public urinals in the City". ". We are trying to manage with the help of water tankers, but that is not ideal as there is much demand for those as well ." Kumar added.

With poorly maintained public toilets, hygiene suffers. Those seeking relief are often forced to use facilities with limited flushing capabilities, resulting in unpleasant odours and unsanitary conditions. This can discourage usage, pushing people towards open defecation, and lead to significant public health risk.

The impact is evident on the ground. Sreenivas M, a janitor at a public toilet in Jayanagar, told **Salar News** "Bore-wells aren't enough, We rely on water tankers, but 5000 liters barely lasts three days." Venkatesh Murthy, another toilet supervisor, near Raghuvanahalli revealed "Not many people come here as there is very little water supply. Sometimes we cannot even clean the toilets due to water shortage, and because of this the foul smell restricts the public from using it."

The current situation isn't without its impact on residents. With many public toilets becoming unusable, people are forced to seek alternatives, which can put a strain on resources at malls, restaurants, and other commercial establishments.

Exploring alternative water sources, such as rainwater harvesting or recycled water systems for flushing, could offer a path forward. Additionally, stricter monitoring of allocated funds and ensuring proper maintenance practices by BBMP are essential. *—Salar News*

SETTING THE STAGE

Officials on duty for SSLC board examinations seen preparing for exams which starts on Monday in Bengaluru on Saturday **PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD**

Cong is divided, trying to dethrone CM: Ashoka

BENGALURU, 23 MARCH

Leader of Opposition R Ashoka on Saturday said that the State Congress resembles a divided family and that a group of people inside the party are plotting to bring down Chief Minister Siddaramaiah.

Speaking at the State BJP election preparation conference held at the Palace Grounds in Bengaluru, Ashoka said, "Prime Minister Narendra Modi has rightly said about the state of the Karnataka Congress party. There are many super Chief Ministers and shadow Chief Ministers in the State. Congress MLA BK Hariprasad is also a part of the plan."

Ashoka called the present State government "useless" for failing to take a firm stand on the Mekedatu project. He called out the government on their inefficiency in handling the drought situation in the State. "This is a government that has betrayed the people. They have shown double standards on the issue of Mekedatu. The ruling Congress government has not handled the drought situation effectively as well. They have even failed to manage the water crisis in the City. People will not support this corrupt government," Ashoka said.Speaking about the upcoming Lok Sabha elections, Ashoka said that the people of the country want a stable government and that can only happen if Prime Minister Narendra Modi comes back to power. Regarding the BJP-JD(S) alliance, Ashoka said, both parties will work unitedly and the ultimate goal is to win the election to make Modi the Prime Minister. *—Salar News*

SEEKING A NEW APPROACH

Multiple swarms of drones to tackle disasters

BENGALURU, 23 MARCH

A new approach by researchers at the Indian Institute of Science (IISc) seeks to use multiple swarms of drones to tackle natural disasters like forest fires.

Forest fires are becoming increasingly catastrophic across the world, accelerated by climate change, it was noted.

"A swarm of drones could be the solution," says Suresh Sundaram, Professor in the Department of Aerospace Engineering, IISc. Although they have not yet been used in India, the use of drones is not entirely new, according to a press release issued by the Bengaluru-based IISc.

Forest fires are becoming catastrophic across the world, accelerated by climate change **PHOTO: PTI**

But in a new study, Sundaram's team proposes taking the technology a step further: Coordinated multi-swarm drones swooping in to quell forest fires.

The solution was to design a special kind of algorithm that would allow the swarm to communicate with each other as well as make independent decisions. In a hypothetical scenario, when an alarm is raised about a potential fire, the swarms can be sent in, each drone armed with cameras, thermal and infrared sensors, and temperature detectors, to spot the fires.

Once the fire is discovered, the drone closest to it becomes the centre of the swarm and attracts others towards it. Interestingly, each drone will also have autonomy to calculate the fire's size and potential spread, and decide how many drones are needed to quench the fire. *—PTI*

PHOTO: PTI

After 70 hours, IT ends searches at WB min's kin's premises

KOLKATA, 23 MARCH

Search operations conducted by Income Tax department at the premises of Swarup Biswas, brother of West Bengal minister Aroop Biswas, concluded on Saturday. The search operations, which started on Wednesday, lasted for more than 70 hours. It took place at various premises of Biswas across Kolkata. I-T department has accused Biswas, a TMC leader, of tax evasion and possession of assets disproportionate to his known sources of income. Jui Biswas, wife of Swarup Biswas, told reporters that the I-T officials have asked for more documents, which would be duly submitted in the coming days. She also alleged that the search operations were a result of a "political vendetta" of the ruling BJP at the Centre against Opposition parties. *—PTI*

Shahjahan sent on 6 day custody by Kolkata court

KOLKATA, 23 MARCH

Suspended TMC strongman Sheikh Shahjahan was sent to six-day police custody by a court in Kolkata in the Sandeshkhali Enforcement Directorate (ED) assault case. "The CBI had prayed for six-day police custody of Sheikh Shahjahan, Sukumar Sardar and Mehbul Molla in case no. 8 of Nazat Police Station. The learned court allowed it...," Raja Bhaumik, the lawyer representing Sheikh Shahjahan and other accused in the Sandeshkhali ED assault case said. Meanwhile, Shahjahan's brother, Sheikh Alamgir and other accused were produced in Basirhat Court on Friday. Alamgir who was arrested by CBI for alleged involvement in orchestrating the January 5 attack on officials of the ED, was sent to five days' custody of the central agency, his advocate said. *—ANI*

Union Min Pramanik has 14 criminal cases against him

Union minister Nisith Pramanik, who has been re-nominated by BJP in Cooch Behar seat for the Lok Sabha elections, has 14 criminal cases pending against him, according to an affidavit filed by him along with his nomination paper. Of the 14 cases pending against the Union Minister of State for Home, nine were registered between 2018 and 2020. The other cases were filed between 2009 and 2014, as per the affidavit. Claiming that the criminal cases were politically motivated, a district functionary of the BJP said that most of the FIRs against Pramanik were registered after he cut off ties with the ruling TMC in West Bengal and thereafter joined the saffron party. The cases registered against the Union minister range from attempt to murder and rioting to house trespass and unlawful Assembly. *—PTI*

'Court relief to Chouhan till 7 June in defamation case'

JABALPUR, 23 MARCH

A special court granted exemption to Madhya Pradesh BJP Chief VD Sharma, former state chief minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan and ex-state minister Bhupendra Singh from appearing before it in person in a criminal defamation case till 7 June. The court direction came while hearing the plea of BJP leaders in a defamation suit filed against them by Congress' Rajya Sabha member and senior Supreme Court advocate Vivek Tankha. Judicial Magistrate First Class Vishveshwari Mishra of the special court to hear cases related to MPs and MLAs granted the exemption Shiv Kumar Shrivastava, counsel for respondents, said. Chouhan and Sharma are BJP candidates from Vidisha and Khajuraho Lok Sabha seats, respectively. *—PTI*

AAP alleges 'money trail tracked to BJP account'

AAP challenged Modi and asked to arrest JP Nadda

AAP workers and supporters at Shaheedi Park during a protest over the arrest of Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal in connection with an excise policy-linked money-laundering case, in New Delhi on Saturday PHOTO: PTI

NEW DELHI, 23 MARCH

A day after a Delhi court sent Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal to the custody of Enforcement Directorate (ED), senior AAP leader and Minister Atishi alleged that the money trail was found in BJP's account and challenged Prime Minister Narendra Modi and ED to 'arrest' BJP national President JP Nadda.

Addressing a press conference here, Atishi asserted that, till date, no money trail has been found connected to any AAP leader. "In the so-called excise policy scam of Delhi, CBI and ED investigations have been going on for the past two years. Where did the money go? No proceeds of crime were recovered from any leader, minister or worker of AAP," Atishi said.

She said that Kejriwal was arrested on the basis of Sharad Chandra Reddy's word. Atishi further said that Reddy donated Rs 4.5 crore bonds to BJP adding that no illegal money was recovered during ED's raid at Delhi's Chief Minister residence.

Special CBI judge Kaveri Baweja of the Rouse Avenue Court passed the order after Kejriwal was produced on Friday following his arrest on Thursday night by the central probe agency. The case pertains to alleged irregularities and money laundering in framing and implementing the Delhi excise policy case 2022, which was later scrapped.

In its arguments before the court, the ED alleged that the CM of Delhi is the key conspirator and kingpin in demanding kickbacks from businessmen.

Meanwhile, AAP office in Delhi has been "sealed" from all sides, its senior leader Atishi claimed on Saturday and said the party will report the matter to the Election Commission.

A Delhi Police officer refuted the allegation. Police personnel were deployed at DDU Marg to stop the gathering of people since CrPC section 144 is imposed there, the officer said. "We detained 25 of them briefly and they were later released," Deputy Commissioner of Police M Harsha Vadhan said.

Also, the local court has directed to preserve CCTV camera footage on a plea filed by Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal, seeking the removal of a Delhi Police officer deployed for security in the court for alleged misconduct.

"Application has been filed on behalf of the accused (Kejriwal) stating that the security staff/in-charge responsible for bringing him for production before the court, namely ACP (Assistant Commissioner of Police) AK Singh, is unnecessarily harsh and mishandled the people around the courtroom," Special Judge Kaveri Baweja noted. The application was filed by Kejriwal on Friday, along with his submissions opposing the Enforcement Directorate's (ED) plea for his custody.

I will return soon: Kejriwal in message read out by wife

Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal's wife Sunita Kejriwal, in perhaps her first such public appearance, read out his message sent from ED custody on Saturday in which AAP Chief said he cannot be kept behind bars for long and he will return soon to fulfil his promises to the people. *—ANI/ PTI*

Conman Chandrashekhar to turn approver against Kejri

NEW DELHI, 23 MARCH

The alleged conman Sukesh Chandrashekhar threatened to expose the former and said that he would become an approver against the Delhi Chief Minister and his team. As he was being produced in court, Chandrashekhar told reporters, "I will become an approver against Kejriwal and his team. I will expose him. I will make sure he is brought to task." When asked about the evidence he has against Kejriwal, Chandrashekhar said, "All the evidence has been given. Truth has prevailed. I welcome him to the Tihar jail." Chandrasekhar is currently under arrest in Tihar Jail. *—ANI*

Today, no one is safe in this country. Anyone can get arrested. The pattern going on in India is similar to that in Russia and China. People have elected Arvind Kejriwal as their Chief Minister, so, only they will decide his fate.

-Sanjay Raut, Shiv Sena (UBT) MP

CBI raids Mahua Moitra's home in cash-for-query case

NEW DELHI, 23 MARCH

CBI teams on Saturday conducted searches on the premises of former TMC MP Mahua Moitra in multiple locations, including Kolkata, in connection with the alleged cash-for-query case, officials said.

CBI sleuths carried out the searches at Moitra's residence in Kolkata and her apartment in Krishnanagar in West Bengal's Nadia district. She represented Krishnanagar Lok Sabha seat.

CBI officers, accompanied by a huge team of central forces, raided an apartment in Alipore area in the southern part of the city where Moitra's father Dipendra Lal Moitra has been residing for several years.

Searches were also being carried out in another apartment used by Moitra in Krishnanagar, they said.

CBI registered an FIR against the former Trinamool Congress (TMC) MP on Thursday on the directives of the Lokpal, which has instructed the agency to file a report within six months, they said.

Security personnel guard as CBI conducts searches at office of Mahua Moitra at Krishnanagar PHOTO: PTI

- CBI officers, accompanied by a huge team, raided an apartment in Alipore area where Moitra's father Dipendra Lal Moitra has been residing for several years.

Moitra was expelled from the Lok Sabha in December for "unethical conduct".

The Lokpal, the anti-corruption ombudsman, issued the directions to CBI after receiving the findings of its preliminary inquiry into allegations made against Moitra by BJP MP Nishikant Dubey.

Dubey, a Lok Sabha member, alleged that Moitra had asked questions in the House in exchange for cash and gifts from Dubai-based businessman Darshan Hiranandani to mount an attack on industrialist Gautam Adani and Prime Minister Narendra Modi, among others. *—PTI*

Gujarat: 2 BJP candidates pull out of LS poll race

AHMEDABAD, 23 MARCH

Two BJP candidates - one each from Vadodara and Sabarkantha Lok Sabha constituencies in Gujarat - on Saturday expressed their unwillingness to contest the upcoming general elections citing personal reasons.

Sitting MP Ranjan Bhatt, who was fielded by the saffron party from the Vadodara seat, announced that she was not keen on fighting the election. Her candidature had faced stiff resistance from some sections within the BJP.

Soon after that, the party's Sabarkantha candidate Bhikhaji Thakor also announced on social media his unwillingness to contest the poll.

Bhatt's decision comes days after banners criticising BJP's decision to renominate her from the Vadodara Lok Sabha came up at different spots in the city. Some local BJP leaders had also expressed their displeasure over Bhatt's nomination.

Bhatt had won the 2014 by-election after Prime Minister Narendra Modi vacated the seat. *—PTI*

Electoral bonds: Congress seeks SC-monitored probe

NEW DELHI, 23 MARCH

Congress on Saturday reiterated its demand for a Supreme Court-monitored SIT probe into the electoral bonds issue, alleging that the "opaque scheme" ensured that prepaid, post-paid and even post-raid bribes could be routed through the banking channel.

Congress general secretary Jairam Ramesh attacked Prime Minister Narendra Modi, alleging that the person who gave a guarantee of 'bringing back black money', instead "legalised corruption and is desperately trying to hide it".

Ramesh alleged that the analysis using the code has brought to light that 38 corporate groups which have got 179 major contracts and projects approvals from the central or BJP state governments have donated electoral bonds.

These companies have got a total worth of Rs 3.8 lakh crore in projects and contracts, in exchange for Rs 2,004 crore in electoral bonds donations to BJP, Ramesh claimed.

BJD got Rs 944.5 cr donations through electoral bonds in six years; Congress seeks clarification

Biju Janata Dal (BJD), led by Odisha Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik, has received Rs 944.5 crore through electoral bonds over the last six years from 2018-19 to 2023-24 (up to September). Data submitted by BJD to Election Commission, now available on ECI website, reveals the breakdown of these donations.

In the initial three years, the party received Rs 213.5 crore in 2018-19, Rs 50.5 crore in 2019-20, and Rs 67 crore in 2020-21. *—PTI*

LIQUOR SCAM CASE

Court extends Kavitha's custody till 26 March

NEW DELHI, 23 MARCH

A court here on Saturday extended the Enforcement Directorate (ED) custody of BRS leader K Kavitha, an accused in the Delhi excise policy money laundering case, till 26 March.

ED has alleged that Kavitha, the daughter of former Telangana chief minister K Chandrashekar Rao, was a key member of the 'South Group' that has been accused of paying AAP kickbacks of Rs 100 crore in return for a big share of liquor licences in the national capital. In its plea seeking an extension of her custodial remand by five days, the federal probe agency said Kavitha was interrogated, confronted with statements of four people and questioned based on the findings during investigation.

Meanwhile, in what could further mount trouble for former Telangana Chief Minister K Chandrashekar Rao's family, ED on Saturday alleged that a nephew of Kavitha was "involved" in the transfer of illicit funds or the proceeds of crime in the Delhi excise policy-linked money laundering case. ED informed Delhi court that it conducted searches at the premises of the said relative, Meka Sri Saran, after his role in the case was revealed during the questioning of Kavitha. *—PTI*

K Kavitha PHOTO: PTI

Six former Congress MLAs of the Himachal Pradesh assembly join the BJP in New Delhi. PHOTO: X/@BJP4India

9 ex-HP MLAs, including 6 from Cong, join BJP

NEW DELHI, 23 MARCH

Nine former Himachal Pradesh MLAs, including six disqualified Congress legislators and three Independents who resigned, joined BJP on Saturday amid the continuing political crisis in the state.

The former lawmakers slammed Congress government in the state headed by Chief Minister Sukhvinder Singh Sukhu, saying development work has stalled since it came to power.

They joined BJP in the presence of Union Minister Anurag Thakur, former Himachal Pradesh chief minister Jai Ram Thakur, its national general secretary Arun Singh and state unit President Rajeev Bindal.

Welcoming the former lawmakers into the party, Anurag Thakur said their presence will further strengthen BJP as he accused Congress government in the state of failing to fulfil its promises, leading to all-round anger among people.

The former Congress MLAs who joined the BJP are Sudhir Sharma, Ravi Thakur, Rajinder Rana, Inder Dutt Lakhanpal, Chetanya Sharma and Devinder Kumar Bhutto -- all disqualified on 29 February for defying a party whip to be present in the House and vote in favour of the state government during a cut motion and budget.

Jai Ram Thakur described the six former Congress MLAs' joining BJP as a big political development for such a small state, noting that several of these leaders had held senior positions within the party.

The former Congress leaders slammed the party, saying its national leadership is no longer visible and offers no vision for the country, leading to its "disintegration".

Sharma, a four-term MLA, alleged that there is no atmosphere for development in the state while the Congress is disintegrating because its leadership lacks vision for the country and has nothing to offer except criticism of Modi. *—PTI*

3-4 Cong's bank account attached, not frozen: BJP

NEW DELHI, 23 MARCH

Congress has multiple bank accounts and just three-four of them have been attached, "not frozen", for non-payment of tax dues, BJP said on Saturday, accusing the Opposition party of making misleading statements on the issue sensing its "imminent" defeat in the Lok Sabha poll.

"These bank accounts have not been frozen, they are operational. You (Congress) can deposit money in these accounts and withdraw too, except Rs 125 crore, which has been attached by Income Tax department due to the non-payment of dues as per Income Tax rules," BJP national spokesperson Sambit Patra said. Referring to media reports, he said Congress has about Rs 1,000 crore in its multiple bank accounts, opened with "multiple PAN" numbers in "violation of its own party constitution". Congress also has a fixed asset of worth Rs 500 crore, BJP leader claimed. "Rahul Gandhi is saying there is no money with Congress to even buy train tickets while he is seen travelling by chartered plane every day," the BJP leader charged and demanded the Congress leader give a "technical answer, instead of political" on the issue. *—PTI*

BACKLASH FROM POLITICAL PARTIES

Army cancels seminar on UCC in J&K

SRINAGAR, 23 MARCH

Army in Jammu and Kashmir on Saturday cancelled a seminar, which was aimed to raise awareness about the Uniform Civil Code and other topics after a backlash from the political parties.

Army late Friday sent invitations to the media houses for a seminar on the subject "Navigating legal frontiers: Understanding Indian Penal Code 2023 and the quest for Uniform Civil Code".

The seminar was scheduled for 26 March at the Kashmir University Auditorium.

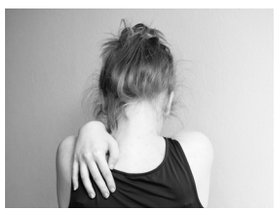
However, there was a backlash from the regional political parties with former chief minister and National Conference (NC) vice president Omar Abdullah questioning the Army's involvement in a "divisive" issue like the Uniform Civil Code in a "sensitive" place like Kashmir.

"Is it appropriate for the Indian Army to get involved in the divisive issue of the uniform civil code & that too in a sensitive area like Kashmir? There is a reason the Indian Army has remained apolitical & areligious. This ill-advised UCC seminar is a threat to both these basic tenets," Abdullah said in a post on X.

He said going ahead with the seminar risks opening up the Army to charges of getting involved in the "murky world" of politics coupled with "interfering" in religious matters.

His party colleague and NC's chief spokesperson Tanvir Sadiq asked the Election Commission of India (ECI) to "assess the appropriateness" of the Army discussing an issue that figures prominently in the BJP's manifesto while the Model Code of Conduct (MCC) is in effect. Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) also criticised the Army for conducting the seminar. *—PTI*

Army also sent invitations to the media houses for a seminar PHOTO: PTI



Telengana cop arrested for sexual assault of teen

HANUMAKONDA , 23 MARCH

A police inspector in the jurisdiction of Kakatiya University police station in Telangana's Hanumakonda district was arrested on Friday for allegedly sexually assaulting a 16-year-old girl.A case was registered against him under sections of the rape and POCSO (Protection of Children from Sexual Offences) Acts. According to the police, the accused was working as an inspector in Bhupalpally Cybercrime. The accused misbehaved with the victim girl on 21 March, according to the police."A case has been registered under the rape section of the POCSO Act. The accused was sent to remand," the police said. *—ANI*

Woman gives birth on train, names baby after train

VIDISHA, 23 MARCH

A 24-year-old woman delivered a baby on a moving long-distance train in Madhya Pradesh's Vidisha district, an official said on Saturday.The woman gave birth to a baby girl on the Mumbai-Varanasi Kamayani Express in the early hours of Friday, prompting her elated family members to name the infant after the train. The woman was travelling with her husband from Nashik in Maharashtra to Satna in MP when she went into labour between Bhopal and Vidisha, Railway Protection Force (RPF) inspector Manju Mahobe said.The official said two women travelling on the same coach helped the female passenger, while a male traveller alerted the RPF about the berth birth. After the train pulled into Vidisha railway station, the newborn and the mother were rushed to the Harda District Hospital.Both are doing well, the RPF official said. The family members of the infant have named her 'Kamayani', after the express train, she said.*—PTI*

2 Naxalites killed in encounter with cops in Ch'garh

BIJAPUR/DANTEWADA, 23 MARCH

Two Naxalites were killed in an encounter with security personnel in Chhattisgarh's Bijapur district, while two jawans were injured in an IED blast in the neighbouring Sukma district, a police official said on Saturday. The gunfight took place around 8.30am on Saturday in a forest under the Gangaloor police station area when a team of personnel from different security forces was out on an anti-Naxal operation, Inspector General of Police (Bastar Range) Sundarraj P told PTI. The operation was carried out at the tri-junction of Bijapur, Dantewada and Sukma districts, considered a Maoist bastion, he said Naxalites opened fire when security forces were cordoning off a forest near Pidia village, over 450 km from the capital Raipur, triggering a gun battle between two sides, he said.*—PTI*

Drug kingpin Bahar Uddin held in Assam

SONITPUR, 23 MARCH

In a joint operation, Assam police and Nagaland police arrested Bahar Uddin, a most wanted narcotics drug trafficking kingpin of North East India, from Assam's Sonitpur district.The arrested drug trafficking kingpin hails from Jeliagrong, Dimapur in Nagaland. According to police, based on secret information, a joint team of Sonitpur district police led by Additional Superintendent of Police (HQ) Madhurima Das, Deputy SP (P) Debasish Kayastha and Nagaland cops launched an operation at a house of Nurja Khatun of Thelamara area in Sonitpur. *—ANI*

35 captured Somali pirates arrive in India

The 35 men are to be prosecuted for hijacking ship off Somalian coast

DHAR, 22 MARCH

Warship INS Kolkata, carrying 35 pirates who were apprehended in an operation off the coast of Somalia, reached Mumbai on Saturday morning, the Navy said.

These pirates were then handed over to the Mumbai police, it said.

The exercise was undertaken as part of the ongoing Operation Sankalp, wherein Indian Navy ships are deployed in the Arabian Sea and the Gulf of Aden for the safety of seafarers and mercantile trade passing through the region.

In an operation lasting over 40 hours that commenced in the early hours of 15 March, INS Kolkata intercepted Pirate Ship ex-MV Ruen in the Arabian Sea based on inputs received by Indian Navy's Information Fusion Centre -Indian Ocean Region from UKMTO (United Kingdom Maritime Trade Operations).

The ship was being used as a Mother Ship for undertaking piracy attacks and hijacking of merchantmen, it said.

INS Kolkata started shadowing the Pirate Ship in the early hours of 15 March.

Pirates apprehended in an operation off the coast of Somalia by the Indian Navy, upon their arrival in Mumbai on Saturday *PHOTO: PTI*

The vessel, upon sighting INS Kolkata, reversed course and started heading towards the Somali Coast. Several armed pirates were observed on upper deck of the ship, the Navy said.

INS Kolkata directed the pirate ship to stop for investigation in accordance with International Law, especially the United Nations Conventions on the Laws of the Sea (UNCLOS).

However, the pirate ship refused to comply and instead opened fire.

"INS Kolkata thereafter acted in self-defence and used kinetic measures required to disable the ship and compel the pirates to surrender," it said.

Aerial surveillance for the operation was undertaken by Indian Navy P8I aircraft, Sea Guardian UAV, and the ship's integral helicopters and spotter drones. *—PTI*

27 Pakistanis among 102 rescued in anti-piracy op

NEW DELHI, 23 MARCH

Over 100 people were rescued, including 27 from Pakistan and 30 Iranians, in different anti-piracy operations, the Indian Navy said in a press conference on Saturday.

The Indian Navy said that besides the anti-piracy operations in the Arabian Sea, including 'Operation Sankalp' and other missions, it also responded to 13 attack incidents to save lives of 110 lives which included 45 Indians and 65 international citizens.

Enhancing capabilities in the Arabian Sea, the Indian Navy has deployed 10 warships along with other surveillance aircraft to thwart any piracy or drone attacks in the region.

Additionally, Indian Air Force's C-17 transport aircraft crew which airdropped Marine Commandos and their equipment in the Arabian Sea for Special Operations against the sea pirates were also present at the Navy chief's press conference on the Indian action.

- Indian Air Force's C-17 transport aircraft crew which airdropped Marine Commandos for Special Operations against the sea pirates were also present at the Navy chief's press conference on the Indian action

The Indian Navy press conference came after it concluded its high-stakes anti-piracy operation in the Arabian Sea on Saturday.

The operation involved a navy destroyer, a patrol ship, an Indian Air Force C-17 transporter flying more than 1,500 miles to airdrop marine commandos, a naval drone, a reconnaissance drone, and a P-8 surveillance jet, the Indian Navy release said. *—ANI*

'WILL TAKE ACTION TO ENSURE A SAFER INDIAN OCEAN'

NEW DELHI, 23 MARCH

Indian Navy will take "affirmative action" to ensure a safer and more secure Indian Ocean Region, its chief Admiral R Hari Kumar said on Saturday while citing the anti-piracy operations undertaken by the naval force in the last 100 days.

In response to a query during a press conference at the newly-built Nausena Bhawan here, he said "no Indian-flagged vessel" has been targeted by the Houthis at sea.

In the last 10 years, this was the largest operation in which the Indian Navy caught 35 pirates, the Navy chief said.

Admiral Kumar also said the Maritime Anti-Piracy Act, 2022, has been a "great enabler" for security forces, especially the Indian Navy, which is involved in anti-piracy operations. He had recently said the Navy has got a shot in the arm because of this legislation and underlined the deployment to counter-piracy attempts. *—PTI*

'India uses 3 times more water for crops than other nations'

NEW DELHI, 23 MARCH

India uses two-to-threefold more water per tonne of crop compared to several developed and developing nations, and this must be reduced and state governments, in particular, should promote sustainable agricultural practices, said Professor Ramesh Chand, Member of government think tank Niti Aayog.

While delivering a key note speech at a function organized in New Delhi on the occasion of World Water Day 2024 by plant protection company Dhanuka Group on Friday, the Niti Aayog member said that the area under cultivation in India has increased but mostly for Rabi crops, when it mostly does not rain.

"This needs to change and state governments in particular need to promote cultivation according to local environmental and geographical conditions," Professor Chand said, as per a press release.

Paddy and sugarcane are two major water-guzzling crops, and India is a major producer of both these crops.

Highlighting the plight of the country's irrigation infrastructure before 2015, Professor Ramesh Chand further said billions of rupees were invested in irrigation projects - medium and major, but the area under irrigation remained stagnant.

"In collaboration with Jal Shakti ministry, we are exploring ways to maximize usage of surface water. For example, if water of a canal is presently irrigating 100 hectare of agricultural land, how can we take it to 150 hectare using various means but same amount of water," Singh added. *—PTI*

SANGRUR TOXIC LIQUOR CASE: DEATH TOLL RISES TO 20

CHANDIGARH, 23 MARCH

The death toll due to the suspected consumption of spurious liquor in Punjab's Sangrur district has climbed to twenty, with six more people succumbing, officials on Saturday said.

Meanwhile, the Election Commission of India on Saturday sought an immediate report from the Punjab chief secretary and the director general of police in the Sangrur hooch tragedy.

The Punjab Chief Electoral Officer had written the Chief Secretary and the DGP to send an immediate preliminary report and a detailed report on Saturday regarding the entire event to apprise the Commission, according to an official statement.

11people are undergoing treatment at Patiala's Rajindra Hospital and six at the Civil Hospital in Sangrur.

Sangrur Civil Surgeon Kirpal Singh on Saturday said that 20 people have died so far in the incident. *—PTI*

'DRACONIAN MEASURE'

Improper preventive detention orders must be nipped in bud: SC

NEW DELHI, 23 MARCH

Observing that preventive detention is a draconian measure and any such move based on a capricious or routine exercise of powers must be nipped in the bud, the Supreme Court has set aside a Telangana High Court order rejecting a detenu's appeal.

A bench headed by Chief Justice of India DY Chandrachud on Thursday said the essential concept of preventive detention is that the detention of a person is not to punish him for something he has done but to prevent him from doing it.

"Inability on the part of the state's police machinery to tackle the law-and-order situation should not be an excuse to invoke the jurisdiction of preventive detention," the bench also comprising Justice JB Pardiwala and Justice Manoj Misra said.

The appellant was arrested under the Telangana

The Supreme Court has set aside a Telangana High Court order rejecting a detenu's appeal *PHOTO: PTI*

- SC, said the law is well settled that the power under any enactment relating to preventive detention has to be exercised

Prevention of Dangerous Activities Act of 1986 on the order of the Rachakonda police commissioner in Telangana on 12 September last year. Four days later, the Telangana High Court rejected the man's petition, assailing the detention order.

The Supreme Court, in its recent order, said the law is well settled that the power under any enactment relating to preventive detention has to be exercised with great care, caution and restraint.

It said that the pendency of prosecution is no bar to an order of preventive detention and an order of preventive detention is also not a bar to prosecution. *—PTI*

Stalin takes stand for noted vocalist TM Krishna

Chennai, 23 March

Tamil Nadu Chief Minister MK Stalin on Saturday backed renowned Carnatic musician TM Krishna and said he is being targeted by a section of people for his progressive ideology.The Chief Minister, in a post on social media said: "It is regrettable that a section of people, due to hatred and with ulterior motives are criticising Krishna as he is continuously talking about the ordinary people and it is in the wake of his progressive political stand." Stalin appealed that 'narrow-minded politics' be not 'mixed up with music' like mingling faith with politics.*—PTI*

EAM ON NEIGHBOURS

Pakistan sponsoring terrorism at 'industry level', says EAM

SINGAPORE, 23 MARCH

Underlining that Pakistan is sponsoring terrorism at almost an "industry level", External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar on Saturday asserted that the mood in India now is not to overlook terrorists and it "will not skirt this problem anymore".

Jaishankar, who is on a three-day visit to Singapore, made these remarks during a Q&A round held post his lecture session on his authored

PHOTO: PTI

book 'Why Bharat Matters' at Institute of South Asian Studies (ISAS) of National University of Singapore (NUS).

Underlining that Pakistan has been sponsoring terrorism against India, Jaishankar asked, "How do you deal with a neighbour who does not hide the fact that they use terrorism as an instrument of statecraft?"

Jaishankar dismisses China's claims on Arunachal Pradesh as 'ludicrous'

External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar on Saturday dismissed China's repeated claims on Arunachal Pradesh as "ludicrous" and asserted that the frontier state was a "natural part of India".

In probably his first public comments on China's frequent claims on Arunachal Pradesh and its opposition to Indian leaders visiting the state, Jaishankar said it was not a new issue. He said Yhis in response to a question on the Arunachal issue after delivering a lecture at the prestigious NUS Institute of South Asian Studies here. *—PTI*

ASI conducts survey of Bhojshala for day 2

DHAR, 23 MARCH

The survey of the controversial Bhojshala/Kamal Maula Mosque complex in the tribal-dominated Dhar district of Madhya Pradesh, being conducted by the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI), continued for the second day on Saturday.

The exercise first began on Friday following an order of the Madhya Pradesh High Court.

Petitioners from the Hindu side Ashish Goyal and Gopal Sharma also reached the Bhojshala complex.

Kamal Maula Mosque Welfare Society President Abdul Samad, one of the parties in the court, told reporters he didn't participate in the process as he was not well and got the information late.

"We respect the high court's decision...There is no problem if the survey is conducted within the ambit of the Constitution and following the orders of the high court, but new issues are being created in it...like the pillars which were placed later in 2004," he claimed.

- The exercise first began on Friday following an order of the Madhya Pradesh High Court. Petitioners from Hindu side Ashish Goyal and Gopal Sharma also reached the Bhojshala Complex

"The (Muslim) community also took objection to it (pillars) and also gave memorandums. Despite the opposition, the pillars remained inside and were not taken out. They want to include that in the survey. Later, an idol was put up. So, we are opposing the new survey," Samad said.

He said the court has passed the order even as various cases filed by the Muslim community members related to Bhojshala were still pending. The Society moved the Supreme Court against the HC order on 16 March for the urgent hearing, but the apex court said it will hear the case on 1 April, he said. *—ANI*

IN AMETHI

Rly workers push faulty coach on track

AMETHI, 23 MARCH

A train inspection coach carrying railway officials was manually pushed to another track after it developed a technical snag, railways said on Saturday.

The incident occurred on Friday when a self-propelled inspection coach carrying Railway officials from Sultanpur to Nihalgarh to carry out the inspection work, malfunctioned before reaching the Nihalgarh Railway Station which is being renamed after Maharaja Bijli Pasi, a rail official said.

The video of the incident surfaced online and was also shared by Samajwadi Party (SP) President Akhilesh Yadav and Congress.

The railway crossing ahead of Nihalgarh Railway Station was already closed because a train was about to arrive.

Since the driver of the technical staff of the inspection coach was not able to fix the

The incident occurred on Friday when the coach carrying Railway officials malfunctioned *PHOTO: SCREENGRAB*

- The railway crossing ahead of Nihalgarh Railway Station was already closed because a train was about to arrive. Since the driver of the technical staff of the inspection coach was not able to fix the fault and the shunting engine was also not available, the employees started to remove the coach by pushing it, he said.

fault and the shunting engine was also not available, the employees started to remove the coach by pushing it, he said.

About a dozen officers and employees pushed it from the main line to the loop line to avoid disruption of the rail traffic, he added.

The inspection coach was sent for repairs later, he added.

Sharing the video, Akhilesh in on X slammed Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) government and said, "Call the Railway minister immediately, get him to push as well."

He added, "It seems that BJP's double engine government did not get fuel from the electoral bonds today, that is why people are forced to push at Nihalgarh crossing in Amethi."

Congress in a post on X said "There was a promise of a bullet train, now the train also has to be pushed. Every sector has been destroyed under the Modi government, and railways have suffered a lot." *—PTI*

VOLCANIC ERUPTION

Lava from a volcanic eruption flows near the town of Grindavik, Iceland, on Friday
PHOTO:PTI

Guns won't stop goals from girl footballers in Manipur

Andro, a village 26km southeast of Imphal has the official clubhouse of Andro's girls football club- AMMA- Andro Mahilla Mandal Association Footbal club and Hemarani is one of the trainers
PHOTO:FACEBOOK/ AMMA FOOTBALL CLUB

India, the world's largest democracy, has kicked off its two and a half month long Smart in her neon blue jacket and bright red sneakers, Hemarani slips out of the large thatched-roof mud hut and stands squinting up at the rising sun. The sky is streaked pink over the Nongmaiching Ching hills, and the wide open field before her is still swimming in fog. Cows are grazing in the green pastures, and alongside, a group of girls in their football kit is warming up.

This is Andro, a village 26km (16 miles) southeast of Imphal, the capital of India's northeastern state of Manipur. The hut Hemarani, 30, has just emerged from is the official clubhouse of Andro's girls football club – AMMA FC – and she is one of the trainers.

This practice session in January is the last one for the girls before an official rest period, which lasts until April. Almost all 30 of the club's players – aged five to 18 – have turned up. Many in the team have been preparing for their school leaving examinations, and this training session offers one last merry diversion from their books.

Quickly, the girls pair up and pick up the pace through rounds of kicks, passes, headers and speed drills. The daily, two-hour practice sessions always end with a game, Hemarani says. "The point is to play everyday."

She gives some of the girls a few pointers about technique, divides up the teams and then lets the senior players like Chingakham Anjali Devi and Phanjoubam Ameba Devi, both of whom are currently players on Imphal's U-17 team, take over. Twelve of AMMA FC's present and former players currently play nationally, five internationally.

The pleasant thump of the ball against boots, calls of "pass," "open, open" and laughter echo across the field. The younger girls shout out to their favourite players and clap from the sidelines. Hemarani lets the game extend a little over the 90-minute mark and then blows the whistle.

- Many in the team have been preparinf for their school leaving examination and this training session offers one last merry diversion from their books. Many of the club players are aged from five to 18

On a normal day, the girls take their time stretching and packing up after the game, chatting about school, movies, boys. But nothing about Manipur is normal these days. Still panting from the game, the girls leave in groups, and Hemarani instructs them to head straight home.

Against a dark background

Just hours before, in a makeshift shack not far from the AMMA FC grounds, a group of women had similarly packed up and headed home. Young and old, they had been sitting awake through the night, warmed by blankets, shawls and a fire, keeping watch over the village. For months now, they have been taking turns guarding the 10,000-strong community in Andro from potential attacks through the night.

Violence broke out in Manipur in May between the majority Hindu Meiteis and the mostly Christian Kuki-Zo people. It was triggered by plans to recognise the Meiteis as a Scheduled Tribe – a type of affirmative action that uses quotas to grant minorities government jobs and college admissions.

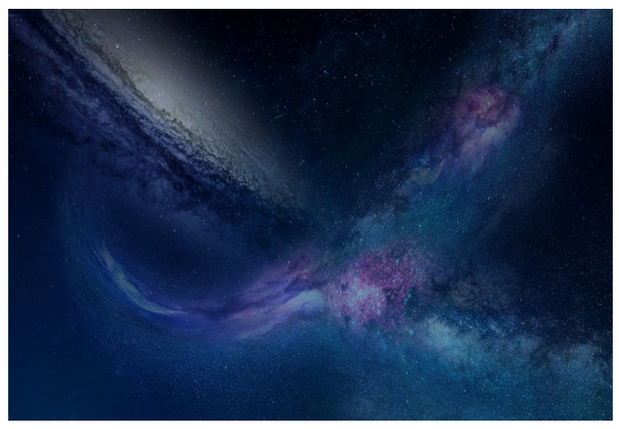
The land of the hill tribes of Manipur – the Kukis, Nagas, Mizos – is protected by constitutional provisions. But similar special status for the Meiteis, who make up 60 percent of the state's population and dominate its politics, could open up the hills too for this majority community, which is currently predominantly in the plains. Violence has raged ever since. *—Al Jazeera*

LETTERS

Write to us at salar@salar.news

SALAR ساڈا

Milky way's oldest building blocks named Shakti, Shiva



Shakti and Shiva are new additions to milky way ***PHOTO: PIXABAY***

Earliest "building blocks" of our Milky Way galaxy have been identified from 12-13 billion years ago, which is very close in time to when the universe's first galaxies started to form, according to a new research.

Naming these groups of stars 'Shakti' and 'Shiva', astronomers said the findings are the equivalent of "finding traces of an initial settlement that grew into a large present-day city".

Milky Way is said to have formed by the merging of smaller galaxies, making way for "fairly large building blocks", according to the researchers.

When galaxies collide and their stellar populations mingle, most of the stars retain very basic properties, directly linked to the speed and direction of their origin galaxy, they explained.

In this study published in The Astrophysical Journal, the research team from Max Planck Institute for Astronomy, Germany, analysed stellar datasets and found that stars from the merging galaxies were crowded around two specific signatures of energy and angular momentum, or the rate at which a spinning object's rotating speed changes. Two different star groups were thus formed -- 'Shakti' and 'Shiva'.

The study's co-author Khyati Malhan named these two structures Shakti and Shiva, the latter one of the principal deities of Hinduism and the former a female cosmic force often portrayed as Shiva's consort.

The researchers found that the "like-minded" stars forming Shakti and Shiva, and coming from two different galaxies, had a higher angular momentum compared to the stars at the heart of the Milky Way.

- Like-minded stars forming Shakti and Shiva, coming from two different galaxies had higher angular momemtum compared to the stars

The higher angular momentum observed was consistent with the stellar groups that had belonged to separate galaxies merging with the Milky Way, the team said.

Also, all these stars were low in metal content, signalling that they were formed a long time ago. Stars formed recently contain more of heavier metallic elements, they explained.

Therefore, their energy and angular momentum, along with low metallic content, comparable with that of the stars at the heart of Milky Way, makes 'Shakti' and 'Shiva' good candidates for some of the earliest ancestors of our Milky Way, the researchers said.

"Shakti and Shiva represent two of those early, massive progenitors that coalesced at high redshift - perhaps 12 gigayears ago - perhaps the last event from the protogalaxy before disk formation commenced," they wrote in their study.

A gigayear has a billion years.

Shakti and Shiva might be the first two additions to the heart of the Milky Way, initiating its growth towards a large galaxy, said study co-author Hans-Walter Rix from Max Planck Institute for Astronomy.

For their analysis, the researchers used the data provided by the European Space Agency's Gaia satellite and combined it with the stellar datasets from the US Sloan Digital Sky Survey, having detailed information about the stars' chemical composition.

Launched in 2013, Gaia's dataset now includes positions, changes in the positions and distances for almost 1.5 billion stars within our galaxy, providing an ideal dataset for this kind of "big data galactic archeology", the team said. *—PTI*

Shakti and Shiva are good candiates for some of the earliest ancestors of our milky way according to the researchers.
PHOTO: PIXABAY

Feeding young kids on a budget? Parents say the mental load is crushing

Feeding babies and toddlers can be challenging at the best of times. But when families can't afford enough food, let alone the recommended range of different coloured vegetables, or iron-rich meats, it's tougher still.

In our recently published research, parents told us how much effort they put in to feeding children when there is little money.

They also told us how the ever-present juggle of budgets and the realities of family life strained relationships and increased their mental load.

Living in poverty

In the cost of living crisis, one in six Australian children live in poverty. More families than ever are seeking help from food banks.

So we asked parents what it was like to feed young children when money was tight. We interviewed 29 Australian parents with at least one child between six months and three years old. Most had an income around or below the poverty line. The average age of parents was 32 years, including 28 mothers and one father. This is what they told us.

Family tensions rise

Families' financial position was precarious, with little buffer to cope with more financial strain. One parent told us:

We're still on the one income [...] We try and get a lot of free vegetables from the food banks and whatnot. We've borrowed money in the past, but the main thing we do is make sure [our child's] food is fine.

This uncertainty about money flowed into relationship tension, and stress about food waste and the food bill. Another parent, who said they had lost weight due to not eating proper meals, told us:

Things have been tense, and [my partner's] pretty upset about outgoing money for [food ...].

There was also strain when young children created a mess with food or threw it on the floor:

But then my partner's like 'why are you buying that bunch of bananas? Most of it's, like, in his hair.' As trivial as it might sound to some households, [it] caused a lot of stress in ours.

- In the cost of living crisis, one in six Australian children live in poverty. More families than ever are seeking help from food banks to meet their needs.

Providing good-quality school meals would relive the pressure on parents ***PHOTO: PIXABAY***

Making trade-offs and sacrifices

Parents described feeding the family as a difficult balance. They put the needs of children and partners first. They often hid their sacrifices from their partners. One parent told us:

My partner doesn't miss out anywhere near as much as what I do. He doesn't know that either. [...] But there is many, many, many days where I will go without a meal.

The unseen mental load

Not having enough money increased the load caused by the thinking, planning and emotional strain of getting enough food to feed everyone. One participant said:

It's always there in the back of my mind [...], what would I do if I really didn't have anything left to feed all of us.

Resilience and creativity

Parents described multiple strategies to make the most of the food they had.

We will now go to the fruit and vegetable shop that's quite far away from our house because it's cheaper to buy it in bulk [... We] pre-plan, absolutely, and meal plan.

Despite hardships, parents adapted to challenges by being creative with food and cooking. One parent said:

In the last food parcel I got there was this big bag of polenta, [...] you don't want to be wasteful [...]. I'll look at [...] simple recipes that have that ingredient [...] and go from there.

Parents valued mealtimes as family time, to connect and share. Parents tried to make the most of their situation and remember that when it comes to meals, "basic doesn't mean bad".

What does this mean for supporting families?

Health professionals working with parents need to know many struggle to feed their family. It's not just a matter of budgeting or cooking; parents already do that. The high mental load parents experience needs to be recognised. Programs and support should be accessible, brief and realistic.

Common advice, such as offering food many times and providing variety to children, may need to be adapted. Variety could be sourced from foods on special, and food waste reduced by offering small amounts of new foods at first.

We also need to ensure the food offered in childcare centres is adequate and healthy. Providing good-quality school meals would relieve the pressure on parents to supply food. This would give children the chance to enjoy a variety of nutritious foods, regardless of their situation at home. *—The Conversation*

Taiwan detects 13 Chinese aircraft, 6 navy vessels

TAIPEI, 23 MARCH

The Ministry of National Defence (MND) in Taiwan seems to have witnessed an increase in Chinese military presence around the nation. Within 24 hours, the MND detected 13 Chinese military aircraft and six navy vessels operating in the region. This surge follows the previous day's detection of 36 Chinese aircraft and six naval vessels. According to the MND, the vessels and military aircraft were detected between Friday 6 am and Saturday 6 am. "13 PLA aircraft and 6 PLAN vessels operating around Taiwan were detected up until 6 am today. 4 of the aircraft entered Taiwan's SW ADIZ. #ROCArmed Forces have monitored the situation and employed appropriate forces to respond," MND said. *—ANI*

PHOTO: X

Slovaks elect successor to first female President

BRATISLAVA, 23 MARCH

Slovaks headed to the ballots Saturday to elect a successor to Zuzana Saputová, the country's first female President and a staunch backer of Slovakia's neighbour Ukraine in its fight against Russia's two-year invasion. She is not seeking a second term. Peter Pellegrini, a close ally of Slovakia's populist Prime Minister Robert Fico, is considered a favourite in the race for the largely ceremonial post of president. He leads a field of nine candidates in the first round of the presidential election to become the country's sixth head of state since Slovakia gained independence in 1993 after Czechoslovakia split in two. *—AP*

Taiwan declares TikTok a national security threat

TAIPEI, 23 MARCH

Taiwan's Minister of Digital Affairs, Audrey Tang, has declared TikTok, the social media platform owned by a China-based company, as a significant national security threat, Central News agency Taiwan reported. Tang emphasised that the platform's association with foreign adversaries aligns with the United States' perspective, which deems TikTok a potential risk to national security. In a recent legislative hearing, Tang stated, "Taiwan has classified TikTok as a dangerous product." She explained that any product susceptible to control by foreign adversaries, either directly or indirectly, poses a threat to national information and communication security according to Taiwan's standards, as reported by CNA Taiwan. The move in Taiwan follows a similar trend in the United States. The US House of Representatives recently passed a bill targeting ByteDance, TikTok's parent company, giving it a timeline to divest its US assets or face a nationwide ban. This legislation mirrors Taiwan's concerns about foreign influence over digital platforms. *—ANI*

Pak to issue 'Panda Bonds' to tap Chinese market

PAKISTAN, 23 MARCH

Pakistan's Finance Minister Muhammad Aurangzeb has said that the country will issue Panda Bonds worth 300 million dollars this year to tap the Chinese market, the state media reported on Friday. Radio Pakistan reported that the minister in an interview with Bloomberg said That China is the second largest bond market in the world and Chinese investors can take advantage of Panda bonds. The Minister said initially bonds worth 250 million to 300 million dollars will be issued and the volume of Panda bonds will be enhanced at a later stage. He said the government's cash balances are strong enough that it is able to pay its debts on time. He said the country is heading in the right direction towards economic stability. *—PTI*

UNSC vote set for Monday on new Gaza ceasfire plan

According to sources the US unlikely to back it

Representatives of member countries take vote during a Security Council meeting at United Nations headquarters in New York, USA *PHOTO: PTI*

UNITED NATIONS, 23 MARCH

The UN Security Council is set to vote on a resolution demanding a humanitarian cease-fire in Gaza during the Muslim holy month of Ramadan, but the United States warned the measure could hurt negotiations to halt Israeli-Hamas hostilities.

The resolution, put forward by the 10 elected council members, is backed by Russia and China, who vetoed a US-sponsored resolution Friday that supported "an immediate and sustained cease-fire" in the Israel-Hamas war in Gaza. The 22-nation Arab Group at the UN issued a statement Friday night appealing to all 15 council members "to act with unity and urgency" and vote for the resolution "to halt the bloodshed, preserve human lives and avert further human suffering and destruction."

"It is long past time for a cease-fire," the Arab Group said. Ramadan began 10 March and ends 9 April. The council scheduled a vote on the resolution Saturday morning. Many members are hoping that the UN's most powerful body, which is charged with maintaining international peace and security, will demand an end to the war that began after Gaza's Hamas rulers launched a surprise attack into southern Israel on 7 October, killing about 1,200 people and taking some 250 others hostage.

Since then, the Security Council has adopted two resolutions on the worsening humanitarian situation in Gaza, but none has called for a cease-fire. More than 32,000 Palestinians in Gaza have been killed during the fighting, according to the Gaza Health Ministry. It does not differentiate between civilians and combatants in its count, but says women and children make up two-thirds of the dead. *—AP*

HEBRON HOSPITAL'S DOC ARRESTED FOR HELPING TERRORISM

TEL AVIV, 23 MARCH

Israeli security forces arrested Dr Rashid al-Zaro, a senior surgeon at the Hebron hospital on suspicion of inciting terrorism and calling for the destruction of Israel. He was arrested in an operation carried out by police special forces under the intelligence direction of the IDF (Israel Defence Forces) Central Command in the city of Hebron. Al-Zaro works as a senior surgeon in the hospital in Hebron and held a permit to work in Israel that was revoked. In the past, he even participated in medical procedures at the Ichilov Hospital in Tel Aviv. *—ANI*

1,000 Sri Lankan workers to come to Israel in March

TEL AVIV, 23 MARCH

The Director General of Israel's Population and Immigration Authority said that in the month of March about 1,000 workers from Sri Lanka are expected to land in Israel for work in its the agriculture sector, primarily picking citrus fruits. Last week 122 Sri Lankan workers landed, this week 377 and next week 258 more workers will land in Israel. Since the 7 October Hamas massacre, distress has arisen in the agriculture sector and since then many efforts have been made to reduce the gaps. Among the steps: opening agreements with other countries to recruit foreign workers and meetings with Israeli employers and embassy representatives. —ANI

HUMAN TRAFFICKING SUSPECTED

IOM said the circumstances of their deaths and their nationalities are still unknown *PHOTO: ANADOLU*

At least 65 migrant bodies found in Libya mass grave

TRIPOLI, 23 MARCH

A mass grave containing the bodies of at least 65 migrants has been found in Libya, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) has said.

The IOM said the circumstances of their deaths and their nationalities are still unknown but they believe they died being smuggled through the desert towards the Mediterranean. The organisation, part of the United Nations, said it was "profoundly shocked" by the discovery.

Libya is investigating, the IOM said. The grave was found in south-west Libya, it said. An IOM spokesperson said: "Each report of a missing migrant or a loss of life represents a grieving family searching for answers about their loved ones or acknowledging the tragedy of the loss.

"The cost of inadequate action is evident in the increasing human deaths and the disturbing conditions migrants find themselves in." The organisation said the tragedy highlighted the need for a co-ordinated response to smuggling of migrants and legal migration pathways.

Libya is among the main departure points for migrants trying to cross the Mediterranean to enter Europe. The Geneva-based IOM also called on Libyan authorities and other UN agencies to ensure a dignified recovery, identification and transfer of the remains.

The discovery of the mass grave comes after at least 60 migrants, who set off from Libyan coast, died when a rubber dinghy ran into trouble in the Mediterranean Sea. The IOM said earlier this month that 2023 was the deadliest year for migrants since records began a decade ago, with at least 8,565 people dying on migration routes worldwide. *—BBC News*

MINE COLLAPSE

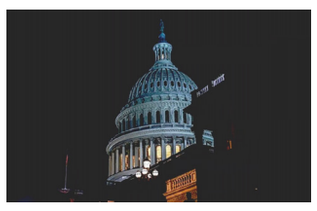
Rescue workers laboured for a fifth day to reach 13 people trapped deep underground in a collapsed gold mine in Russia's far east, news reports said *PHOTO: PTI*

US House passes $1.2T spending bill

WASHINGTON, 23 MARCH

The Senate passed a USD 1.2 trillion package of spending bills in the early morning hours on Saturday, a long overdue action nearly six months into the budget year that will push any threats of a government shutdown to the fall. The bill now goes to US President Joe Biden to be signed into law.

The vote was 74-24. It came after funding had expired for the agencies at midnight, but the White House sent out a notice shortly after the deadline announcing the Office of Management and Budget had ceased shutdown preparations because there was a high degree of confidence that Congress would pass the legislation and the president would sign it on Saturday.



White House *PHOTO: ANII*

- The bill now goes to US President Joe Biden to be signed into law

"Because obligations of federal funds are incurred and tracked on a daily basis, agencies will not shut down and may continue their normal operations," the White House statement said. Prospects for a short-term government shutdown had appeared to grow Friday evening after Republicans and Democrats battled over proposed amendments to the bill. Any successful amendments to the bill would have sent the legislation back to the House, which had already left town for a two-week recess.

But shortly before midnight Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer announced a breakthrough. "It's been a very long and difficult day, but we have just reached an agreement to complete the job of funding the government," Schumer said.

The House passed the bill Friday morning by a vote of 286-134, narrowly gaining the two-thirds majority needed for approval. *—AP*

Zardari asks parties to solve Pak political crisis

ISLAMABAD, 23 MARCH

Pakistan President Asif Ali Zardari on Saturday urged all political parties to set aside their differences to tackle the multiple problems faced by the country amidst increasing political polarisation and a spike in terror attacks.

Zardari was addressing the 84th Pakistan Day celebrations and army parade held at the Parade Ground area here. The day marks the adoption of the historic Lahore Resolution on this day in 1940 which provided a framework for the realisation of the goal of a separate homeland for Muslims of South Asia.

Saudi Defence Minister Khalid Bin Salman was the guest of honour on the occasion. Zardari inspected the parade of tri-services and admired the preparedness of the forces. He also used the occasion to urge for building internal consensus while shunning political differences.

"I request all political parties that they should set aside all their political issues and work for the development and prosperity of the country," Zardari, who was elected as President earlier this month, said. Zardari was referring to the protest by the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) against the alleged rigging in the election and imprisonment of its leader Imran Khan.

Zardari said that Pakistan was facing multiple challenges but the newly-elected government would address the challenges faced by the country.

He said Pakistani forces were strong enough to face the threat and defend the country, adding that the success of Pakistan against terrorism has been acknowledged by the world. The President said the country had already set up the Special Investment Facilitation Centre (SIFC), including top civil and military leadership, to make key decisions regarding developing important sectors like mining, agriculture, and information technology. *—PTI*

Pakistan President Asif Ali Zardari *PHOTO: PTI*

Protesters call on UN to urge Pak to vacate PoK

GENEVA, 23 MARCH

Political activists from Pakistan-occupied Kashmir (PoK) and Gilgit-Baltistan held a protest outside the United Nations in Geneva on Friday, demanding Pakistan vacate its forces from the occupied territories in accordance with the UN Security Council Resolution.

The protest was organized under the auspices of the National Equality Party JKGBL during the 55th Session of the UN Human Rights Council. Professor Sajjad Raja, a political activist from PoK and Chairman of the National Equality Party JKGBL, stated, "We are here today to raise our voice against the violation of basic human rights in PoJK and Gilgit Baltistan. We are living like animals in GB and PoJK. We want Pakistan out of PoJK and Gilgit Baltistan as advised by the United Nations. It marks the 77th consecutive year of oppression, lacking basic human rights, and fundamental freedom in PoJK and Gilgit Baltistan."

"So, we are here to call on the United Nations to implement its resolutions. The first part of the resolution stipulates that Pakistan must withdraw its army and citizens so that the people of Jammu & Kashmir, Gilgit Baltistan, and PoJK can decide their future," said Sajjad. The protesters carried banners reading "Act 1974 of Pakistan occupied Jammu Kashmir & Order 2018 of Gilgit Baltistan is a violation of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights" and "Why is the UN continuously failing to force Pakistan out of Pakistani occupied Jammu Kashmir & Gilgit Baltistan". *—ANI*

Chinese coast guard blasts Philippine boat

MANILA, 23 MARCH

Two Chinese coast guard ships fired at a Philippine supply boat with water cannon on Saturday in the latest confrontation near a disputed South China Sea shoal, causing heavy damage to the wooden vessel, Philippine officials said.

It was not immediately clear if the Philippine navy crew was injured, or whether their damaged boat, the Unaizah 4 May, managed to maneuver past the Chinese coast guard blockade to deliver supplies to Philippine forces manning a territorial outpost in the nearby Second Thomas Shoal. It's the second time this month the Unaizah May 4 has been damaged during an attempt to resupply the outpost.

PHOTO: PTI

The shoal has been occupied by a small contingent of Philippine navy personnel on a marooned warship since the late 1990s, but has recently been surrounded by Chinese coast guard. *—AP*

'NEED PRIVACY'

King Charles hails Kate's courage after cancer news

LONDON, 23 MARCH

King Charles III is "so proud of Catherine for her courage" in speaking about her treatment for cancer, Buckingham Palace has said. The King, who has been diagnosed with cancer himself, is in the "closest contact with his beloved daughter-in-law", a short statement read.

Kate, the Princess of Wales, said Friday she has cancer and is undergoing chemotherapy. Her condition was disclosed in a video message recorded on Wednesday and broadcast Friday, coming after weeks of speculation on social media about her whereabouts and health since she was hospitalised in January for unspecified abdominal surgery.

Kate asked for "time, space and privacy" while she is treated for an unspecified type of cancer. "I am well," she said. "I am getting stronger every day by focusing on the things that will help me heal." Kate, 42, hadn't been seen publicly since Christmas until video surfaced this week of her with her husband, Prince William.

The news is another shock for the royal family since the announcement last month that King Charles III was being treated for an unspecified type of cancer that was caught while undergoing a procedure for a benign enlarged prostate.

Britain's Kate announcing that following her abdominal surgery "tests after the operation found cancer had been present *PHOTO: PTI*

Charles, 75, has withdrawn from public duties while he has cancer treatment, though he's appeared frequently in photos carrying on meetings with government officials and dignitaries and was even seen going to church. *—AP*

Shree Tirupati Balajee files draft paper for IPO

MUMBAI, 23 MARCH

Shree Tirupati Balajee Agro Trading Company has filed a draft red herring prospectus with the financial markets regulator, the Securities and Exchange Board of India for its initial public offering (IPO). The proposed public issue will comprise 2.04 crore shares with 1.47 crore fresh shares and an offer-for-sale (OFS) of 56.9 lakh shares by promoter Binod Kumar Agarwal, the draft paper showed. Offer for Sale means the promoters (owners) selling their shares to raise additional funds for the company. Reportedly, the company had on 28 December last year filed the draft papers for an IPO of 1.67 crore equity shares and called it off later. Promoter Agarwal holds 88.38 per cent in the bulk packaging solutions company, the draft paper showed. The company is engaged in the business of manufacturing and selling of Flexible Intermediate Bulk Containers (FIBCs) -- large flexible bags and other industrial packaging products such as woven sacks, woven fabric and narrow fabric, and tapes in the Indian domestic market and overseas. It caters to clients from diverse industries like chemicals, food mining, agriculture industry, lubricants and edible oil by supplying them FIBC products for transportation purposes and their packaging requirement. *—ANI*

Stallion India Fluorochemicals files paper for public issue

MUMBAI, 23 MARCH

Mumbai-based Stallion India Fluorochemicals has filed a draft red herring prospectus with the financial markets regulator, the Securities and Exchange Board of India for its initial public offering (IPO). The proposed initial public offering (IPO) will be a mix of 1,78,58,740 fresh equity shares and an offer-for-sale (OFS) of 43,02,656 equity shares by promoter Shazad Sheriar Rustomji, the document said. Offer for Sale means the promoters (owners) selling their shares to raise additional funds for the company. Shazad Sheriar Rustomji holds 94.60 percent stake in the company, and 5.37 percent shares are held by the public shareholder Geetu Yadav, the document showed. Stallion is in the business of selling refrigerant gases and industrial gases and related products. Its primary business consists of debulking, blending and processing of refrigerant and Industrial gases and selling of pre filled cans. It has over two decades of extensive experience in this domain. Reportedly, Stallion India had withdrawn its previous draft papers filed with the regulator for an initial public offering on 18 December, 2023. *—ANI*

WCopEF aims to create 500 campus cooperatives

NEW DELHI, 23 MARCH

World Cooperation Economic Forum is targeting to establish 500 campus cooperatives in universities across the country to attract youth to this movement. According to a statement on Saturday, World Cooperation Economic Forum (WCopEF), along with the National Cooperative Union of India (NCUI) and Confederation of NGOs of Rural India (CNRI), will work to establish and promote 'Campus Cooperative' across various universities in the country. Under the new initiative, the forum said that it is planning to set up a 'Campus Cooperative' at Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU) in the national capital. "There is a much greater emphasis on the cooperative sector across the country, but the participation of youths holds the key to taking the movement forward," Dileep Sanghani, Founder of WCopEF, said. The campus cooperatives can play a huge role in fulfilling the requirements of students for various products, including food items. Leading cooperative sector experts have come together to form the WCopEF, which endeavours to promote cooperative movement. *—PTI*

Invest in India's chip sector, says EAM

India missed manufacturing bus in previous decades

NEW DELHI, 23 MARCH

External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar on Saturday briefed Singapore's business community about the strides taken by India in the field of manufacture of semiconductors and appealed to them to invest in this key sector in the country.

Jaishankar spoke about how machines for the manufacture of semiconductors have started coming (to India) and also how India is progressing towards establishing the first three plants for this multi-billion dollar industry.

"There is a degree of purpose and seriousness as well as investment going into manufacturing that has not been seen for a long time," the Minister told a 300-plus audience, mostly Singapore-based members of the business community.

He was answering questions at the Institute of South Asian Studies (ISAS) of the National University of Singapore (NUS) after a lecture on his book 'Why Bharat Matters.'

Jaishankar, who is on a three-day visit to Singapore and reached here earlier in the day, highlighted "a very good global manufacturing response to the Production Linked Initiative (PLI) Scheme," but at the same time reminded the audience that India had missed the manufacturing bus in the previous decades.

External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar with with leading Singaporean Corporate figures, in Singapore *PHOTO: PTI*

- Jaishankar spoke about how machines for the manufacture of semiconductors have started coming (to India) and also how India is progressing towards establishing the first three plants for this multi-billion dollar industry

Semiconductors are an essential component in almost everything, from electronic gadgets to consumer goods and from solar panels, satellites to weapons. Currently, India imports almost 90 per cent of its requirements of semiconductors.

Combining the two primary focus areas, the 'Digital India' and 'Make In India,' the Modi government has launched 'India Semiconductor Mission' as a specialised and independent business division to enable India's emergence as a global hub for electronics manufacturing and design.

Jaishankar told the investor audience about three semiconductor plants being set up in India and said, "We have started to get machinery for semiconductors today to start to build in India." *—PTI*

AMID ALLEGATIONS

It also said that to promote safety of products, the usage of pharmacologically active substances has been banned in aquaculture since 2002 *PHOTO: PTI*

India has safe framework for seafood units, says comm min

NEW DELHI, 23 MARCH

India has a robust regulatory framework for its 548 seafood units and it has set up world-class facilities in the fish processing sector, which are regularly inspected and monitored by various government agencies, the commerce ministry said on Saturday.

The statement comes in the backdrop of some reports alleging food safety and bad labour conditions in the Indian shrimp industry.

It said that all its units are registered with MPEDA (Marine Products Export Development Authority) and FSSAI (Food Safety and Standards Authority of India) and approved by EIC (export inspection council) as mandated by the law.

Additionally, 46 independent pre-processing units are registered by the authority.

The shrimp hatcheries and aquaculture farms are registered with the Coastal Aquaculture Authority (CAA) and State Fisheries Departments based on their respective locations.

MPEDA also enrols aquafarms to bolster the traceability system of aquaculture products and adhere to national and international regulatory provisions, including Seafood Import Monitoring Programme (SIMP) of the US.

"The production and processing systems are regularly monitored by regulatory agencies in India and are subjected to audits by inspectors of the US FDA (Food and Drug Administration), European Commission, GAC of China, Export Inspection Agency, MPEDA, etc., in addition to scores of private and certification audits," it said.

It added that the pre-processing and processing units follow a HACCP (Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Point)-based food safety management system as per the US Code of Federal Regulations.

It also said that to promote safety of products, the usage of pharmacologically active substances has been banned in aquaculture since 2002.

The national regulations and monitoring measures such as the National Residue Control Plan, ELISA screening labs, in-house labs, and pre-export checks ensure that the food safety hazards, including antibiotic residues, do not enter the product value chain and pose any consumer health risk.

The ministry said that measures have been taken to impose a ban on the usage of the two antibiotics Chloramphenicol and Nitrofuran in all food-producing animal systems.

MPEDA has also initiated a certification scheme, 'Shaphari', for the production of quality produce. *—PTI*

INCREASE AVAILABILITY

Earlier, it was prohibited till 31 March this year *PHOTO: PTI*

Government extends ban on onion exports

NEW DELHI, 23 MARCH

The government has extended the export ban on onion till further orders to increase domestic availability and keep its prices under check.

Earlier, it was prohibited till 31 March this year.

"Export prohibition on export of onions valid till 31st March 2024, is extended until further orders," the Directorate General of Foreign Trade (DGFT) has said in a notification dated 22 March.

DGFT is an arm of the ministry which deals with exports and imports-related issues.

On 8 December, 2023, the government banned export of onions.

In the 2023 rabi season, onion production was estimated to be at 22.7 million tonnes.

The export of onions to friendly countries is allowed on a case-to-case basis after approval from the inter-ministerial group.

The government has permitted exports of 64,400 tonnes of onion to the UAE and Bangladesh through the National Cooperative Exports Ltd (NCEL).

Earlier, the Centre, in October 2023, had decided to step up the sale of buffer onion stock at a subsidised rate of Rs 25 per kg in retail markets in order to provide relief to consumers.

To control prices, the government has earlier taken several steps. It had imposed a minimum export price (MEP) of USD 800 per tonne on onion exports on 28 October till 31 December, 2023.

In August, India had imposed a 40 per cent export duty on onions up to 31 December, 2023.

Onion is a politically sensitive commodity. *—PTI*

MARUTI INVESTS IN AI STARTUP AMLGO LABS

NEW DELHI, 23 MARCH

Automaker Maruti Suzuki lndia has invested about Rs 1.99 crore in Amlgo Labs Private Limited, a technology-led startup. The startup operates in the area of data analytics, cloud engineering, machine learning (ML) and artificial intelligence (Al), to assist companies in data driven decision making.

With this, Maruti Suzuki will own an equity stake of over 6.44 per cent in the startup, the automaker informed stock exchanges on Saturday.

The investment is being made through the Maruti Suzuki lnnovation Fund, an initiative to undertake strategic investments in startups which exhibit high levels of technological innovation.The company invested in Sociograph Solutions Private Limited, in June 2022.

"We have been working with startups since 2019, as a part of the Maruti Suzuki lnnovation Program. Aligned with the government's Start Up India initiative, we are actively working to help strengthen the startup ecosystem and encourage innovation to develop solutions relevant to the automobile industry," HisashiTakeuchi, Managing Director and CEO, Maruti Suzuki India. *—ANI*

PHOTO: X

ON ACCOUNT OF INFLATION

Amazon India revises seller fee structures

NEW DELHI, 23 MARCH

E-commerce major Amazon on Saturday said it is revising its seller fees on account of inflation and interest rates, as well as to match the industry-prevalent fee structures. Starting 7 April, Amazon.in is revising its fee structure, including referral fees, closing fees, and weight handling fees besides other ancillary fee heads, for sellers on its marketplace.

"These revisions take into consideration various macro-economic factors such as inflation, interest rates, operational costs etc, and align with industry-prevalent fee patterns," the company said.

Referral fees will be reduced in categories like apparel, bedsheets, cushion covers, and dinnerware, and increased in categories like business and scientific supplies, chimneys, laptop sleeves and bags, and tires, a company statement said. Closing Fee has been increased by Rs 3 for average selling price of more than Rs 1,000. Weight handling fee has been increased by Rs 2, in line with inflationary increase in shipping costs, it said.

"We recognise seller fees and

PHOTO: PTI

as strong long-term levers that will help sustain a robust thriving marketplace, focused on digitising small and medium businesses in the country and enabling them to grow into strong national brands. "These changes reflect our commitment to make Amazon. in one of the most preferred marketplaces for selling in India and creating right choices for sellers to grow efficiently," says an Amazon India spokesperson.

The other fee heads include technology fees, and pick and pack fees. Zero Fee fulfilment policy has been removed, due to which weight handling shipping fee will now be charged for standard-sized shipments priced over Rs 20,000 effective from April 30, 2024. *—PTI*

AMUL PRODUCTS GO INTERNATIONAL WITH LAUNCH IN US

ANAND, 23 MARCH

Popular dairy brand Amul, whose tagline is 'Taste of India', has now launched fresh milk products on the international stage for the first time and is now ready to cater to the people in the United States.

"I am pleased to inform that Amul shall be launching its fresh milk products in the United States of America. Happy to inform that we have tied up with a 108-year-old dairy cooperative in the US – Michigan Milk Producers Association, and this announcement was done at their annual meeting on 20 March at Detroit," said Jayen Mehta, Managing Director of Gujarat Cooperative Milk Marketing Federation (GCMMF), which operates Amul."This is for the first time Amul fresh products range will be launched anywhere outside India and in a market like the United States, which has a very strong Indian and Asian diaspora," Mehta told ANI.Further, he said Amul hopes to expand the brand and become the largest dairy company in line with the vision given by Prime Minister Narendra Modi when he attended its golden jubilee celebrations recently. *—ANI*

Q1-2024

Office space leasing off to a strong start

NEW DELHI, 23 MARCH

The demand for office spaces during the first quarter of 2024 has been strong, registering total leasing of 13.6 million square feet across the top six cities. It is a remarkable 35 per cent increase compared to the same period last year, according to professional services and investment management company Colliers.

Although this is a significant drop from the record office space take-up in the last quarter of 2023, the remarkable annual increase is indicative of upbeat occupier sentiment, given the fact that the first quarter is typically slower, Colliers said in a report.

Bengaluru and Hyderabad emerged as frontrunners for demand of Grade A office space in the first quarter of 2024, cumulatively accounting for more than half of the India leasing activity.

The office market of Hyderabad saw 2.2x space uptake in Q1 2024 as compared to the corresponding quarter last year. This demand was driven by healthcare and pharma and technology sectors.

Bengaluru witnessed significant new project completions, contributing to 45 per cent of the total new supply *PHOTO:PTI*

"Hyderabad continues to strengthen its role as a prominent commercial office market in the country. The city offers occupiers including Global Capability Centers considerable price arbitrage compared to other markets. Furthermore, proactive government policies, continuous infrastructure upgrades and a favorable business ecosystem makes Hyderabad a compelling destination for investors, occupiers, and leading developers of commercial real estate in India," said Arpit Mehrotra, Managing Director, Office services, India, Colliers.

During Q1 2024, new supply across top six cities remained steady, at 9.8 million square feet, almost at par with the level seen in Q1 2023.According to Colliers, Bengaluru witnessed significant new project completions, contributing to 45 per cent of the total new supply, followed by Hyderabad at 27 per cent share. With demand outpacing supply, average rentals saw up to 8 per cent uptick on a yearly basis across most of the major markets.

- Bengaluru and Hyderabad emerged as frontrunners for demand of Grade A office space in the first quarter of 2024

"As business sentiments and economic outlook remains positive, domestic occupiers, especially will continue to drive the office market of the country," said Vimal Nadar, Senior Director and Head of Research, Colliers India. *—ANI*

Norges Bank supports ICICI Securities delisting

NEW DELHI, 23 MARCH

Amid Quantum Mutual Fund voting against the proposed delisting of ICICI Securities, the largest public shareholder Norges Fund Investment Bank has voted in favour of the proposal of the stock broking arm of ICICI Bank.

The foreign fund, which holds nearly 3.25 per cent stake in ICICI Securities, voted in favour on Thursday, the first day of e-voting, as per the information posted on the website of Norges Fund Investment Bank.

However, Quantum Mutual Fund, which holds a 0.09 per cent stake in ICICI Securities, voted against the resolution on Thursday.

Quantum Mutual Fund opposed the delisting as it did not find the swap share ratio lucrative to the shareholders of ICICI Securities.

As per the scheme of arrangement, shareholders of ICICI Securities will get 67 shares of ICICI Bank for every 100 shares they hold.

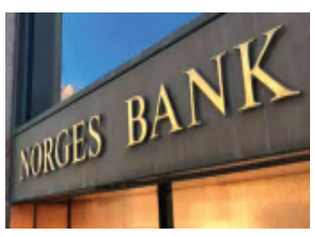


PHOTO: X

Life Insurance Corporation is the second biggest public shareholder, with a 2.5 per cent stake in ICICI Securities. Indian insurance companies, including LIC, hold a 3.5 per cent stake, while mutual funds hold a 2 per cent stake.

The total shareholding of foreign portfolio investors is 10 per cent.Resident Indians hold nearly 6 per cent. ICICI Bank is the promoter of the company, with nearly 75 per cent shareholding.

If the resolution goes through, ICICI Securities will eventually become a wholly-owned subsidiary of ICICI Bank. *—PTI*

Punjab Kings prevail over DC by 4 wickets

Harshit, Russell guide KKR to nervy four-run win over SRH

CHANDIGARH, 23 MARCH

It was not the comeback Rishabh Pant had wished for as English all-rounder Sam Curran's counterattacking half-century powered Punjab Kings to a four-wicket win over Delhi Capitals in their Indian Premier League (IPL) opener here on Saturday.

Curran blazed away to a 47-ball 63 and got excellent support from compatriot Liam Livingstone (38 not out off 21 balls), as Punjab completed a chase of 175 with four balls to spare.This was after the returning Pant failed to set the stage on fire as Punjab Kings rallied to stop Delhi Capitals at 174 for nine.

Batting at number nine, Abhishek Porel top-scored for DC with an unbeaten 32 off only 10 balls, helping the side to a total that did not pose any problem for Punjab on a pitch with no demons.

Not the ideal comeback for Rishabh Pant - Andre Russell PHOTO: PTI

Punjab Kings 177 for 6 (Curran 63, Livingstone 38*, Kuldeep 2-20, Khaleel 2-43) beat Delhi Capitals 174 for 9 (Hope 33, Porel 32*, Arshdeep 2-28, Harshal 2-47) by four wickets.

Kolkata Knight Riders opened their IPL 2024 campaign with a bang as they registered a thrilling 4-run win against the SunRisers Hyderabad at the Eden Gardens on 23 March.

Put to bat first, KKR started well with opener Phil Salt hitting 3 sixes in the 2nd over to get the crowd going within the power play.

However, it was Andre Russell and Harshit who helped KKR make a remarkable turnaround from 119/6 to 208/7 in the first innings.

Chasing a challenging total of 209, Hyderabad started well in the power play with openers Mayank Agarwal (32) and Abhishek Sharma (32) but the duo couldn't take SRH to a comfortable position in the chase. Quick wickets saw the visitors struggle at 111/4 at the 13-over mark. —*PTI*

TODAY'S MATCH

RAJASTHAN ROYALS vs LUCKNOW SUPER GIANTS

Time: 3:30 PM

Where To Watch:

Jio Cinema, Star Sports Network

Stadium: Sawai Mansingh Stadium in Jaipur

TODAY'S MATCH

GUJARAT TITANS vs MUMBAI INDIANS

Time: 7:30 PM

Where To Watch:

Jio Cinema, Star Sports Network

Stadium: Narendra Modi Stadium in Ahmedabad

PHOTO: PTI

Srikanth makes first semis in 16 months at Swiss Open

BASEL, 23 MARCH

Star shuttler Kidambi Srikanth emerged as the lone Indian survivor at the Swiss Open Super 300 badminton tournament when he progressed to the semifinals with a straight-game win over Chinese Taipei's Chia Hao Lee here.Playing his eighth tournament this season, Srikanth dished out a calm and composed performance on his way to a 21-10 21-14 win over world no. 34 Lee in 35 minutes on Friday night.Guilty of throwing away matches from advantageous positions too many times, Srikanth, who is now being coached by Parupalli Kashyap, finally seemed to have a hit a bit of form as he dished out a near-flawless performance to outclass Lee.With the win, Srikanth made his first final-four appearance in 16 months. He last played a semifinal at Hylo Open in November 2022.

Srikanth, a 2021 world championships silver medallist, will next face Chinese Taipei's world no. 22 Lin Chun-Yi later on Saturday. —*AP*

PHOTO: AFP

England captain Harry Kane to miss Brazil clash

LONDON, 23 MARCH

England captain Harry Kane will miss Saturday's friendly against Brazil and is "extremely doubtful" to face Belgium next week. Kane suffered an ankle injury playing for Bayern Munich in their 5-2 win over Darmstadt last weekend and will not be risked for the meeting with Brazil at Wembley. The former Tottenham striker also faces the possibility of missing Tuesday's friendly against Belgium at Wembley. That will be the final match before England boss Gareth Southgate names his Euro 2024 squad, although Kane has no worries about his place on the flight to Germany in June.

Ajax midfielder Jordan Henderson and Chelsea forward Cole Palmer remain with the England squad. —*AP*

PHOTO: AFP

Verstappen takes pole position for F1 Australian GP

MELBOURNE, 23 MARCH

Max Verstappen not surprisingly clinched pole position for Sunday's Australian Grand Prix. More surprising was record eight-time Australian pole winner Lewis Hamilton not making it into the final round of qualifying on Saturday. Verstappen, who has won both races to start the season in Bahrain and Saudi Arabia, with his Red Bull teammate Sergio Perez second both times, will start in the front row for Sunday's 58-lap race on the temporary Albert Park street circuit. It was the 35th pole of Verstappen's F1 career. Carlos Sainz, returning from appendix surgery ahead of the last race in Saudi Arabia, was second-fastest, followed by Perez in third."It was a bit unexpected but I'm very happy," Verstappen said. —*AP*

Pandya begins high-profile MI captaincy stint against GT

AHMEDABAD, 23 MARCH

Hardik Pandya PHOTO: AFP

Hardik Pandya will aim to build on the rich legacy of his predecessor Rohit Sharma when he begins his Mumbai Indians captaincy stint with a match against Gujarat Titans, a team that the star all-rounder himself marshaled over the last two seasons, in the IPL here on Sunday.Such is the professional ways of IPL that Pandya, having led the Titans to the title and runners-up finish in the previous two seasons, has gone back to the Mumbai Indians where he made a name for himself.The tournament also marks Pandya's comeback from a 'freak' ankle injury he picked up in the middle of the ODI World Cup in October.The form of the injury-prone all-rounder with both bat and ball will be closely tracked in the tournament that precedes the T20 World Cup in the USA and Caribbean.With Pandya moving on to the other side, the Titans will be led by Shubman Gill, who assumes the responsibility with very little captaincy experience.Mumbai have been grappling with fitness issues to their key players. —*PTI*

SHUBHANKAR FIRES 4-UNDER TO MOVE UP TO FOURTH PLACE

SINGAPORE, 23 MARCH

India's Shubhankar Sharma is finding form ahead of his home event at the Hero Indian Open next week, as he moved up to fourth place at the Porsche Singapore Classic here on Saturday.

He shot a fine 4-under 68 after rounds of 68-69-68.

Sharma, who last won in 2018, moved to 11-under despite a closing bogey and was two shots behind leader David Micheluzzi who finished with back-to-back birdies to take a one-stroke lead after the third round.

Sharma had three birdies in his first six holes and then went through eight pars before he found back-to-back birdies. —*PTI*

Diksha makes second straight cut on Epson Tour

ATLANTIC CITY, 23 MARCH

India's Diksha Dagar added 3-over 74 in the second round of the Atlantic Beach Classic and made her second cut in as many weeks on the Epsom Tour here on Saturday.

She shot 70 in the first round. She was lying tied for 45th at the end of the second day but had a chance to make amends in the third and final round on Sunday.

She had a roller-coaster round this day with four birdies against five bogeys and a double bogey but survived the cut. Lauren Stephenson finished her round just before play was suspended on the second day at the Atlantic Beach Classic. She shot 32-39 for 71 and led the field.

A much-needed birdie on the par 5 18th closed the round for Stephenson, who will likely enter the final round with a two-shot lead.

Diksha Dagar PHOTO: AFP

Kim Kaufman was also able to sneak in her full round before sunset on Friday evening, carding the tied second-lowest round of the day with a 2-under 69. She was at 6-under and lying second. —*AP*

K L Rahul PHOTO: PTI

FOCUS ON FIT AGAIN K L RAHUL AS LSG FACES RAJASTHAN

JAIPUR, 23 MARCH

The focus will be on KL Rahul's form and fitness when he returns from a quadriceps injury to lead the Lucknow Super Giants in their IPL opener against Rajasthan Royals here on Sunday.

Rahul missed the last four Tests against England due to pain in his right quadriceps. He was out for four months last year after undergoing a thigh surgery.

LSG captain will look to hit top gear not only as a batter but also as a leader, especially after guiding the team to successive playoffs in the first two seasons.

Rahul is likely to play purely as a batter, at least in the initial phase of IPL, but the additional burden of keeping strengthens his chances of making the T20 World Cup squad.

His opposite number on Sunday, Sanju Samson, is also a candidate for the wicket-keeper role in the India squad for the ICC event and he too will be keen to find his rhythm right from the start.

RR had come tantalizingly close to clinching a second title before Gujarat Titans broke their heart in the final in 2022. They looked good in the initial stages even last season but slipped to fifth place in the end.

Both teams will have some tough calls to make as they figure out their best XI.

RR has a solid batting lineup, boosted by the likes of in-form Yashasvi Jaiswal, and Jos Buttler, besides skipper Sansom. They also have a finisher in Dhruv Jurel, who made an impressive India debut. —*PTI*

Aryna beats Badosa at Miami Open days after boyfriend's death

BENGALURU, 20 MARCH

World number two Aryna Sabalenka returned to the court for the first time since the death of her former boyfriend earlier this week and kept her emotions in check as she beat Spain's Paula Badosa 6-4 6-3 on Friday.

After six hours of rain delays, Sabalenka walked onto the court wearing an all-black outfit, a choice matched by her close friend Badosa.

Two-times Australian Open winner Sabalenka on Wednesday said she was "heartbroken" by the death of her former boyfriend Konstantin Koltsov in a statement on Wednesday, where she revealed they had not been a couple at the time of his death.

Koltsov died on Monday with Miami police saying he had jumped from the balcony of a room at a resort in an "apparent suicide."The former NHL ice hockey player and coach was 42 years old. Sabalenka made a slow start to the match but broke to go 4-3 up in the first set and never looked back from that point on.

Aryna Sabalenka PHOTO: AFP

The Belarusian then broke in the third game of the second set with a superb cross-court forehand winner and showed too much power for her Spanish opponent as she wrapped up the win in one hour 22 minutes.

The two players embraced at the net before leaving the court without an on-court interview. Sabalenka has asked the WTA to be excused from media duties at the tournament. Badosa said she was not surprised by the way Sabalenka was able to maintain her focus and deliver a solid performance."

She is a very, very strong woman, strong personality. You can see it on the court...I know her off-court so it doesn't surprise me at all," she said."I knew she was going to play very well or like normal. I told her I wish her the best and let's see if she can go deep in this tournament," added the Spaniard. Badosa had said before the match that she expected it to be "uncomfortable" playing against Sabalenka given her friendship with the Belarusian. —*AP*

Former PCB chairman Shaharyar Khan dies

LAHORE, 23 MARCH

Shaharyar Khan, a career diplomat and former Pakistan Cricket Board chairman who played a big role in restoring cricket ties with India in the early 2000s, died on Saturday. He was 89.

The Bhopal-born Pakistan diplomat, who was a cousin of former India captain Mansur Ali Khan Pataudi, breathed his last here after battling a prolonged illness.

He served as Pakistan's foreign secretary between 1990-94 and also as a High Commissioner in New Delhi and the United Kingdom.

Shaharyar headed the PCB from 2003 to 2006, a period when India toured Pakistan twice, and from 2014 to 2017.

He also worked as Pakistan team manager during the 1999 tour of India and the 2003 Cricket World Cup. He belonged to the royal family of Bhopal.

A learned personality who also wrote several books on his experiences in foreign relations and cricket, Shaharyar, in an interview last year, expressed regrets that in his last tenure as PCB chief, he couldn't revive regular bilateral Test cricket ties with India which have been suspended since 2007 due to the tense relations between the two neighbors.

Shaharyar Khan PHOTO: AFP

Perhaps the biggest controversy in his tenure as PCB chairman was Pakistan forfeiting the Oval Test to England in 2006 for which he blamed the then captain, Inzamam-ul-Haq.

Shaharyar later expressed concerns over Inzamam's push for introducing religion into the team. —*AP*

EUROPEAN CHAMPIONSHIP

Colombia defeat disappointing Spain in friendly match

MADRID, 23 MARCH

Colombia inflicted Spain's first defeat in almost a year with a 1-0 friendly victory in London on Friday. Crystal Palace defender Daniel Munoz struck in the second half after a superb run by Luis Diaz to capitalise on a disappointing display from La Roja ahead of this summer's European Championship in Germany. Spain, who won the Nations League last year to end an 11-year run without silverware after triumphing at Euro 2012, underwhelmed in their second loss under coach Luis de la Fuente.

The first came in March 2023 in a defeat by Scotland in Euro 2024 qualifying which cast early doubt over the coach's credentials for the job, with concerns easing over the subsequent months.

De la Fuente picked an experimental line-up against Colombia, handing Athletic Bilbao defender Dani Vivian his debut in the heart of defence while resting captain Rodri among others.

On Thursday the coach said he hoped the country's football would draw admiration despite the Spanish federation's recent turmoil, making headlines this week as part of a corruption investigation that saw its headquarters searched by police.

However Spain did not shine against Nestor Lorenzo's Colombia side, who have now gone 20 matches unbeaten in a streak longer than two years.

Colombia inflicted Spain's first defeat in almost a year PHOTO: AFP

- Colombia inflicted Spain's first defeat in almost a year with a 1-0 friendly victory in London on Friday. Crystal Palace defender Daniel Munoz struck in the second half after a superb run by Luis Diaz to capitalise on a disappointing display from La Roja ahead of this summer's European Championship in Germany.

"From defeats you learn more than from wins, it was a very hard game," said De la Fuente.

"We did some things very well but others we have to improve, especially from the second half."

La Roja did shade the first half with Vivian heading over a cross from Alejandro Grimaldo, who put in several dangerous balls, and Gerard Moreno's volley saved well by Colombia goalkeeper Camilo Vargas.

Colombian supporters made up the majority of the crowd and they were brought to their feet by Liverpool winger Diaz on occasion.

Former Real Madrid playmaker James Rodriguez came on at half-time for Colombia to further excite their fans and he turned the tide in Los Cafeteros' favour. —*AP*